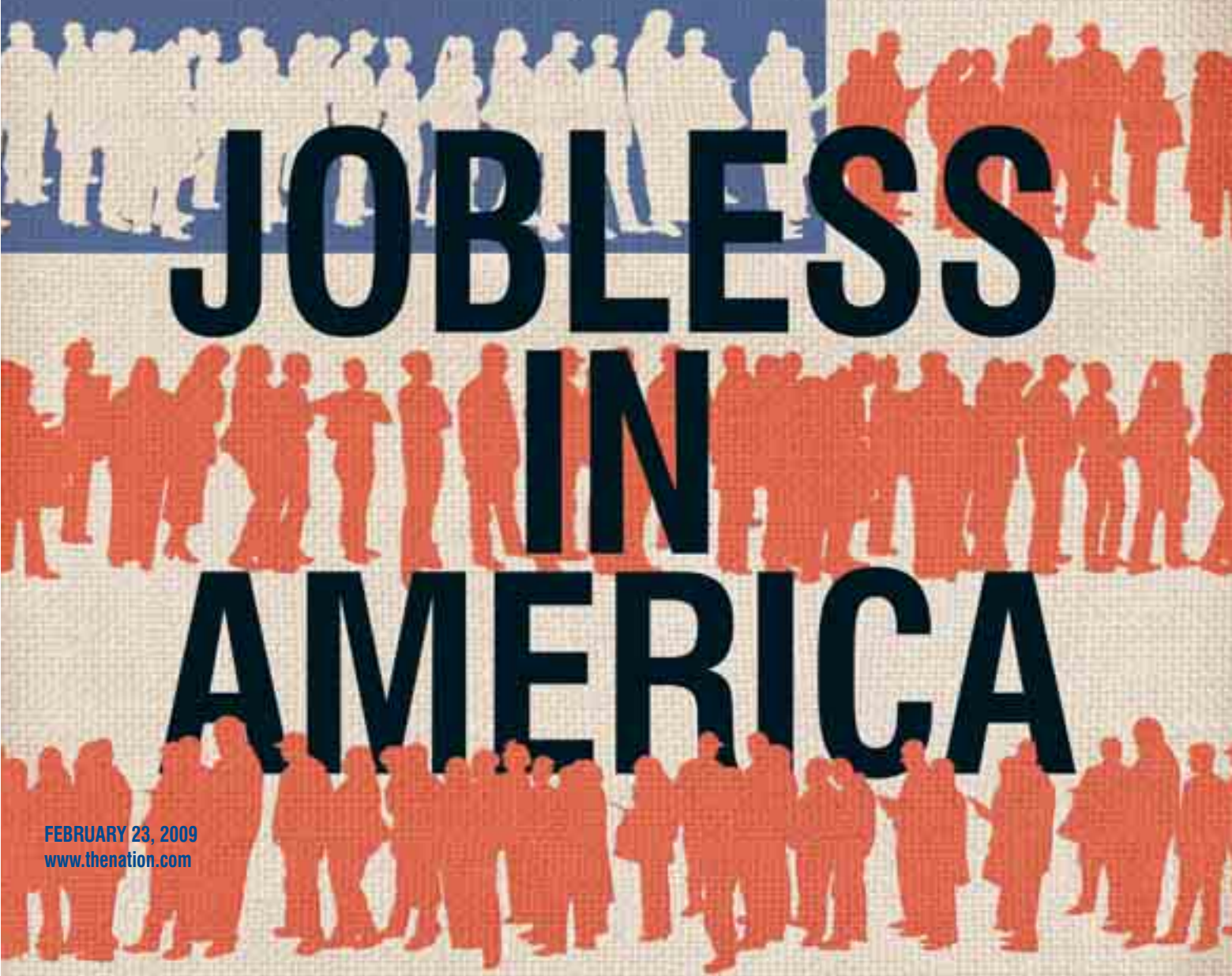
DON'T ESCALATE IN AFGHANISTAN! The Editors

THE Nation.



JOBLESS IN AMERICA

FEBRUARY 23, 2009
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LETTERS FROM THE FORGOTTEN UNEMPLOYED

NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN & READERS OF *THE NATION*

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Letters

Obama's First 100 Days?—Shut Up!

Carlisle, Pa.
Let him *alone* already! Maybe he'll need 165 days, maybe even 278. This mindless 100-day watch has to end [Tony Badger, "FDR's 100 Days… and Obama's," Jan. 26]. Surely the sophisticated editorial board of *The Nation* can recognize that stuffing a jaunty cigarette holder in the mouth of Obama-cum-FDR does not change the facts: FDR was unique; 1933 is gone. Just because some keen wits managed to package much of FDR's doings in a neat 100-day bundle should not have put such a time burden on Harry or Dwight or John or Lyndon or… you get my drift.
Dick Brady

EFCA: With Friends Like These…

Oakland, Calif.
Thanks to Esther Kaplan for her excellent article "Can Labor Revive the American Dream?" [Jan. 26], which presents a compelling case that unionization and collective bargaining are essential to rebuilding living standards, that the NLRA has failed to provide a level playing field for workers to organize and must be reformed, and that the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) is an excellent proposal whose opponents are the usual enemies of labor. Unfortunately, by prominently featuring SEIU president Andy Stern in the lead paragraph, associating himself with progressives and describing the scale of the SEIU campaign for EFCA, and quoting SEIU secretary-treasurer Anna Burger, the article appears to legitimize Stern and Burger as visionary, progressive leaders, fighting for EFCA.

In fact, Stern and Burger are doing more to ensure the defeat of EFCA than any other players in the debate by living out the worst stereotype of the bad union boss. The Blagojevich matter is but the tip of the iceberg. Stern and Burger's worst transgressions are against union democracy and SEIU members. The corrupt and antidemocratic practices that mark their union leadership are beyond the pale even by past SEIU standards. It's no surprise that EFCA's opponents have made Stern the poster child of their campaign. They may be evil, but they're not fools. The sooner other union leaders and the progressive media confront, expose and condemn Stern's behavior and the SEIU international executive board's acquiescence in it, the better the odds will be for EFCA. Wouldn't it be a tragedy for workers to be denied the opportunity EFCA represents because the bad acts of one highly visible leader provide cover for conservative and swing-district legislators under very heavy pressure from anti-EFCA forces?
Charlie Ridgell
SEIU, UHW retiree

Sugar Land, Tex.
I couldn't be more pleased with Esther Kaplan's article. As a registered nurse for more than thirty years I have strongly supported nurses unionizing. It's been a long, hard road here organizing nurses. We've put up with a great deal of harassment and abuse from hospital administrations over the past two years. We have very few legal resources and no support from the local media. We are hoping Obama and the Senate don't wimp out on us. They *must* pass EFCA. There is no other way to go. It was the unions that created the middle class in this country, and it's through unionization that we will be a strong middle class again.
Linda Record Srungaram, RN

Breathless

Saratoga Springs, N.Y.
It's a cliché in movies when a couple, not obviously in love yet, kiss for the first time and—midway through the kiss—something changes and their kiss plunges deeper than either of them originally intended. At the end of it they back away, dizzy and swooning, and the audience knows exactly what happened. This is how I feel after reading JoAnn Wypijewski's "The Kiss" [Jan 12/19]. I'm swooning. I'm dizzy. She's left me breath-

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(continued on page 24)

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Don't Escalate in Afghanistan

President Barack Obama has wisely ordered an internal review of the administration's options in Afghanistan before proceeding with the current plan to send 30,000 more troops, which would nearly double the 32,000 fighting there. For the sake of the country, his presidency and the peace and stability of South Asia, Obama should take US-led military escalation off the table. Instead he should focus on devising a regional strategy to stabilize Afghanistan and strengthen Pakistan. Escalating the occupation of Afghanistan would bleed us of the resources we need for economic recovery, further destabilize Pakistan, open a rift with our European allies and negate the positive effects of withdrawing from Iraq on our image in the Muslim world. Escalation would have all these negative consequences without securing a better future for the Afghan people or increasing US security.

EDITORIAL

There's no denying that the situation has deteriorated over the past few years; the Taliban now threaten to take over large parts of Afghanistan. But more US forces will not bring stability. We are losing the war not because we have had too few troops but because our presence has turned the Afghan people against us, swelling the ranks of the Taliban.

Any good will the US military once enjoyed has long since been destroyed by airstrikes that have killed civilians. Human Rights Watch reports that at least 321 Afghan civilians died in NATO or US air raids in 2007. According to the UN, many more were killed the following year. Sending more troops will not win back the hearts and minds of their loved ones. The conspicuous corruption of the Karzai government has also taken a toll. The United States is now viewed as propping up an unpopular regime that *New York Times* reporter Dexter Filkins describes as seeming "to exist for little more than the enrichment of those who run it," and "contributing to the collapse of public confidence…and to the resurgence of the Taliban."

Adding 30,000 troops might be enough to keep the government from falling in the short term, but it will not be nearly enough to wage the kind of counterinsurgency some Obama advisers advocate. For that, some military experts estimate, we may need as many as 600,000. But even a force one-quarter that size would be an immense burden on the US economy, given our debt from the financial crisis. It would almost certainly mean the postponement, if not the end, of Obama's proposals for universal healthcare and a green economy.

It is doubtful that even a major counterinsurgency could succeed. Indeed, it may only engender more resistance and encourage support for the Taliban in Pakistan to stop what would be seen as the advancement of US and Indian interests. If we learned anything from the British and the Soviets, it is that Afghans fiercely resist outside powers and that some in Pakistan are eager to prevent outsiders from controlling its neighbor, especially if those outsiders have good relations with India. Afghanistan is called "the burial ground of empires" for good reason.

In recent Congressional testimony Defense Secretary Robert Gates seemed to rule out the more ambitious goal of stabilizing Afghanistan, suggesting instead the narrower goal of preventing it from being a launching pad for terrorism. But he acknowledged even that would require more troops. Gates did not explain why he would commit more troops to keep Afghanistan from being a terrorist haven when Al Qaeda already operates freely in parts of Pakistan and when the Taliban and Islamist terror groups have sanctuaries in Pakistan's tribal areas. Indeed, the effect of military operations in Afghanistan has been to push Islamists across the border into the tribal areas and Pakistan's North West Frontier Province.

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The key to defeating Al Qaeda and its extremist protectors lies with the Pakistani government and its ability to control its remote territories. But there's the rub: major groups within Pakistan's military and intelligence services are reluctant to act against Pakistan's extremists for fear it would help the United States and India gain control over Afghanistan. Thus military escalation would likely counter our efforts to get Pakistan's government to secure its territory against Al Qaeda. Worse, expanding the war may only deepen divisions in Pakistan and further weaken its fragile democratic government. Even if US escalation achieves the limited goal of denying Al Qaeda a presence in Afghanistan, it could lead to the destabilization of Pakistan, with devastating implications for regional and international security. As Andrew Bacevich, a retired Army colonel and professor of history and international relations at Boston University, recently wrote, "To risk the stability of that nuclear-armed state in the vain hope of salvaging Afghanistan would be a terrible mistake."

By any measure, the disintegration of nuclear Pakistan would pose a much greater threat to our national security than would the continued presence of Al Qaeda in remote border areas. In fact, the value of Afghanistan and Pakistan as Al Qaeda safe havens is greatly exaggerated. Pakistan's tribal areas are of limited use in training extremists to blend into US society or learn how to fly airplanes or make explosives (most of the planning for the 9/11 attacks took place in Germany and Florida, not Afghanistan). Nor is this remote, isolated area a good location for directing a terror campaign, recruiting members or threatening global commerce. That is why Al Qaeda is a decentralized network whose leaders in Pakistan can offer little more than moral support and encouragement. American safety thus depends not on eliminating these faraway safe havens but on common-sense counterterrorist and security measures—intelligence cooperation, police work, border control and the occasional surgical use of special forces to disrupt imminent terrorist attacks.

Instead of more troops, we need a regional diplomatic strategy aimed at replacing the US-led NATO occupation with a multinational coalition that would bring about a power-sharing arrangement and new governing structure. This would include more moderate elements of the Taliban who reject Al Qaeda and other terrorist groups and would help enforce a halt to the violence. Such a plan would have a better chance of isolating Al Qaeda in Pakistan and giving that country's government the space it needs to take on extremists.

It won't be easy for an international coalition to stabilize Afghanistan, but it will have a better chance if it has few US fingerprints. Therefore, Obama should make clear that this regional strategy envisions withdrawing troops and reconstituting the mission under UN, not NATO, auspices. We may associate Afghanistan with 9/11, but actually it now poses a regional problem, not a US security threat. It is inextricably tied to the geopolitics of Central and South Asia; its problems must be solved by the region's powers, albeit with our diplomatic and financial contributions to development and reconstruction. Progress in stabilizing Afghanistan depends on progress on Pakistani-Indian relations. It also depends on constructive involvement by Iran, which has an interest in tamping down the narcotics trade and in preventing a return of the Taliban. China and Russia have interests in Afghanistan, too, and can contribute to its reconstruction.

Including these regional powers in a multinational coalition

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and providing it with diplomatic support will not be easy. But it is a task more worthy of President Obama's pledge to make the United States a respected world leader again than sending more young men and women to die in the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan, which would make this Obama's war. The decision he makes in the coming weeks about Afghanistan will tell us a lot about whether his presidency will succeed in restoring America or will fall victim to a futile war in a distant land.

Biden v. Summers

100 DAYS

Dick Cheney used to brag about leaving the office of the president "stronger than we found it," and in some perverse, narrow sense he probably accomplished that for his office of vice president. The most influential vice president in history, Cheney succeeded in a near-total capture of the White House policy-making apparatus, transforming his office's role. This has left Joe Biden with, well, strange shoes to fill and no specific brief. But with the announcement on January 30 that he will be chairing the new White House Task Force on Middle Class Working Families, it is clear that Biden is inserting himself forcefully into the economic policy debates in the new administration.

The main players in Barack Obama's economic team can be cleaved roughly into two groups: (1) center-right neoliberals like Larry Summers, head of the National Economic Council; his deputy, Diana Farrell; and Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner; and (2) progressive labor-liberals like Melody Barnes, director of the Domestic Policy Council; Biden's chief economic adviser, Jared Bernstein; and labor secretary nominee Hilda Solis.

In the Clinton administration über-neoliberal Robert Rubin famously won against labor-liberal Robert Reich, pushing privatization, deregulation and balanced budgets over a more robust welfare state. But in the intervening years wage stagnation, rising inequality and this financial crisis have pushed the neoliberals in a more progressive direction. It's hard to imagine the Larry Summers of 1993 saying that income inequality is the "defining issue of our time," as he recently did, or, for that matter, advocating a stimulus package that may run as high as $900 billion.

The problem is that Summers and Geithner seem to have retained their dispositional trust in the market and skepticism of public sector involvement. So instead of nationalizing banks, as many economists urge, they're reportedly busy crafting a plan for TARP II similar to former Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson's ill-fated attempt to purchase bad assets from the banks. According to *The New Republic*'s Noam Scheiber, whenever someone proposes a policy that crosses Summers's delicate threshold for Big Government, he derides it as "Putinesque." Unfortunately, reviving the financial sector may require measures that would make even Putin blush.

On top of that, Summers has already come to dominate the White House economic policy shop. One person close to Obama's economic team told me that on economic policy, "it's looking like it's Larry's show." This leaves a disconcerting vacuum in the White House for a labor-liberal voice equal in stature and clout. Enter, perhaps, Joe Biden.

Noted.

DASCHLE DOWN: On February 1, I urged President **Barack Obama** to withdraw former Senator **Tom Daschle**'s nomination as secretary of health and human services in order to "revive the change brand he campaigned and won on." On February 2, Obama said he was "absolutely" standing behind his nominee. On February 3, the **New York Times** joined me in calling on Daschle to step aside, and by that afternoon he had withdrawn.

Daschle's failure to pay back taxes raised questions about his suitability for the job, but it was his ties to healthcare firms—payments of some $300,000 from companies he might have regulated as HHS secretary—that were most troubling. Daschle's activities, though not officially lobbying, made for a lucrative trade advising clients seeking influence with the government. The appearance of a conflict of interest undermined Obama's promises to bring a new era of responsibility to Washington. Thankfully, Obama—who has imposed tougher ethics and lobbying rules than any president—understood he had "screwed up" and moved swiftly to put aside Daschle as a distraction from moving ahead to fix our broken healthcare system. KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

NEW LOOK, OLD IDEAS: Faced with the choice between a television-tested, sound bite–savvy African-American spin doctor and a Southern party hack who only recently quit his all-white country club, the **Republican National Committee** chose the black guy as its new chair. The process only required six ballots. This represents progress for the GOP, but just a little. The new chair, **Michael Steele**, is no less doctrinaire in his social and economic conservatism—and in his foreign-policy neoconservatism—than the man he beat, **Katon Dawson**. That didn't stop religious-right operatives from objecting to Steele's suggestion that a party that has lost the past two election cycles might need to tinker with its image to become viable again.

The right-wingers needn't have worried. While Steele will put a more attractive facade on the party, he proposes no change of direction. This is just a job for him. Ever since he lost a 2006 Maryland Senate race—in which his backers hired homeless people to distribute literature creating the false impression that Steele was a Democrat—his stated ambition has been to lead the national party. There is no evidence to suggest that he will try to—or that he could—turn the GOP toward the more modern, tolerant, environmentally friendly and socially responsible stances adopted by conservative parties in Britain and France. In fact, while he will put a smarter, smoother face on the party, Steele promises the sort of ideological and ethical continuity that should keep the Republicans just where **George W. Bush** and **Dick Cheney** left them. JOHN NICHOLS

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In December he named Bernstein, formerly of the labor-friendly, stoutly progressive Economic Policy Institute, to be his chief economic adviser, a position with no recent precedent. Bernstein then co-wrote the first economic report released by the transition team, which attempted to quantify the benefits of the president's proposed stimulus. He is one of the people present for the daily economic briefings to the president.

In the weeks before inauguration, Biden reached out to labor leaders, including the AFL-CIO's John Sweeney, confirming that he would be a strong advocate for them in the White House. And he has publicly supported "Buy American" provisions in the stimulus package that would require participating firms to purchase their materials from domestic companies—a measure that Summers pointedly refused to endorse during a recent briefing with reporters.

Biden is "really pushing hard" on "a more progressive populist approach to economic policy," says Mike Lux, the transition's liaison to the progressive movement. "I'm just delighted that there's somebody with his clout that's doing this, otherwise our side would be in a lot worse shape."

Biden's task force is charged with "improving work and family balance, restoring labor standards, including workplace safety," and "helping to protect middle-class and working-family incomes." Its first meeting will be in late February in Philadelphia and will focus on green jobs. "The purpose of the task force," a White House official told me, "is to keep the administration's focus as it develops its economic plans on the people who need to be helped the most, especially at a time when we have to bail out banks and financial institutions."

Task forces in Washington can be highly influential or just dog-and-pony shows. It's unclear yet which this is. But it bears watching just how much influence labor-liberals have. Will the administration move forcefully and quickly on the Employee Free Choice Act—which Biden said they want to get to "this year"—or stall and compromise it to death? Will they enact a large-scale foreclosure mitigation program and bankruptcy reform or continue to sluice money to banks exclusively? Will the "fiscal responsibility summit" slated for February be just a rhetorical sop to the entitlement hawks or the opening salvo in a new war against Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security?

In the meantime, the rhetoric, at least, has been encouraging. It didn't get a lot of attention, but on January 30 Obama made probably the most unabashedly pro-union statement of any president in at least sixty years. "I do not view the labor movement as part of the problem. To me it's part of the solution," he said at an event where he signed three executive orders reforming federal workforce policy. "We need to level the playing field for workers and the unions that represent their interests, because we know that you cannot have a strong middle class without a strong labor movement."

I don't know if Larry Summers would agree, but maybe, if Joe Biden has anything to say about it, Summers's opinion won't matter.

CHRISTOPHER HAYES

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

Incentives

The Wall Street ways are mighty funny:
A bonus comes for losing money.
About this rule they're quite devout.
No wonder they need bailing out.

France in the Streets

Paris

"Nowadays, when there is a strike in France, no one notices." Nicolas Sarkozy could not repress a self-satisfied snarl when he uttered those words at a meeting of his conservative party six months ago. But following a one-day general strike and huge street demonstrations across the country in January, the French president was far less ebullient, merely stating that he understood the "legitimate concerns" of his fellow citizens.

COMMENT

To be sure, Sarko can rely on a strong majority and a weak opposition. And he claims to be doing his utmost to withstand the tidal wave coming from Wall Street; he thundered against the excesses of capitalism and ordered bankers to forgo bonuses if they want to benefit from a stimulus package. But he could not fail to notice that while most slogans of the January 29 marches were about bread-and-butter issues ("Billions for health and education, not for speculation!"), a few were clearly aimed at the resident of the Élysée Palace. "Hey Sarko, can you see this strike?" teachers walking in Paris shouted. Others sang, in English, "Sarko! No you can't! Yes we can!"

They were among the 1 million (according to the police) to 2.5 million (say the organizers) demonstrators who poured into the streets across France, responding to the first unanimous call of major trade unions in fourteen years. Conservative politicians and pundits shrugged off this "so French" habit of taking to the streets and blasted the unions for rehashing outdated leftist demands. Some, noting that there was no unifying cause, described the protests as an act of collective catharsis prompted by the darkening economic clouds. But there was more to it.

To begin with, the marches took place not just in large cities but in small towns. Moreover, they featured not only the expected outpouring of civil servants and employees of state-owned companies but numerous private-sector workers as well. "I'm not a union guy and I'm not a political guy, but I see what's happening and I'm really worried," said François, a middle-aged aeronautics employee marching quietly alongside boisterous hospital workers in Paris. "And I don't think the politicians realize what's happening in factories and companies."

Sarkozy's leanings toward ostentatious watches and vacations have undermined the anti-elitist image that helped him win the presidency in May 2007. Moreover, whereas French presidents traditionally focus on foreign policy, Sarkozy is constantly intervening on a broad array of domestic issues normally under the purview of the prime minister, for instance appointing the head of the main public TV channel or initiating judicial reform. Sarkozy has thus become a "hyper-president" whose authoritarian

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ways have drawn comparisons to Napoleon. He risks becoming a punching bag if the national mood continues to sour; his economy minister has even warned of possible "social unrest."

For now, Sarkozy's best ally is the Socialist Party, which he adroitly weakened by appointing several members to government positions. The Socialists have also played their part by spending much of the past year in vicious internecine battles. As a result, they are being challenged on the left by two new parties: the Party of the Left, headed by one of their recently departed leaders, and, further left, the Trotskyist Anti-Capitalist Party, led by Olivier Besancenot, a charismatic young postman turned political star [see Perelman, "Letter From Lille," June 16, 2008]. These forces are calling for an in-depth economic revamping that would grant broad powers to the state and more sway to workers. While "the left of the left" is unlikely to garner enough votes to challenge the Socialists as the main opposition force, it is having a field day with the crisis and has been encouraged by a poll showing that a unified "left of the left" slate at the June European Parliament elections would get 14.5 percent.

The conservative camp is officially very concerned about the red peril. But just as Socialist president François Mitterrand used the rise of the far-right National Front to weaken conservatives in the 1980s, Sarkozy and his underlings are quite happy to see Besancenot & Co. emerge as rivals to the Socialists. Martine Aubry, the new Socialist leader, is thus trying to reunify the party by leaning left and attacking Sarkozy, depicting him as a threat to civil liberties. In January Socialist lawmakers stormed out of Parliament to protest efforts by the ruling party to curtail the opposition's right to amend laws—the first such incident since 1974. Aubry has also presented a stimulus package that would grant more money to French citizens rather than to their banks and ordered her troops to join the January 29 demonstrations.

But pols, right or left, were not exactly on the minds of the marchers. "I have been to quite a few of these before, but I have never seen such anguish," said René, a veteran of the old Communist union CGT. "There is a strange smell in the air."

MARC PERELMAN

Marc Perelman, a freelance journalist based in Paris, was formerly the diplomatic correspondent of the Forward.

'Retire Bush' Contest Winner

Last year we launched a contest here and on our website asking readers to suggest what our soon-to-be-ex-president should do in retirement. The contest attracted more than 2,000 entries. Most were satirical with subtexts of anger and contempt. A number of readers called on Bush to atone for what he has done by working in a VA hospital or asking forgiveness in houses of worship. The most popular suggestions revolved around public service in Iraq, jail for war crimes, returning to the oil business, teaching English as a second language and clearing brush. The winner is Kristen Wack. Her prize is an original drawing by Edward Sorel (left). The winning entry:

George W. Bush should host a revised version of the TV reality show *The Biggest Loser*, on which corporate executives compete weekly for the most colossal management debacle. The winner gets a $200 million severance package and a presidential pardon. *—Kristen Wack*

Runners-up:

George W. Bush has accepted a position as professor of Middle Eastern studies at Liberty University. It will be co-taught by Professor Cheney, who will lecture via a small box placed on Professor Bush's back under his tweed jacket. *—Kate and Brian Deimling*

Putting his many flight suits and jackets to good use, Bush finally fulfills his service commitment to the Texas Air National Guard. Mission Accomplished! *—William J. Astore*

After leaving office, W. will do… nothing! Hasn't he done enough damage already? *—Michael Williams*

After leaving office, W. will become curator of his Presidential Library and Museum, where he wants to explain and exhibit the results of what really transpired deep in the bowels of his administration. *—Bob Sutherland*

W. will be busy assembling a legal dream team to fight extradition to The Hague for war crimes. *—Al Bennett*

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Alexander Cockburn

Auguries in the Dawn of Obama-Time

Looking back on the dawn of the Clinton administration in 1993, supporters of President Obama must surely feel gratified at their man's performance to date. They contrast the chaos of Clinton's liftoff with the disciplined tempo of the new crowd taking over the White House. They can savor the dispatch with which the forty-fourth president has pushed forward with the stimulus program and even tossed a few bouquets to the left—curtailment of official torture by the CIA, refreshing edicts on ethical guidelines and equal pay.

Perhaps even more inspiriting by contrast with the forty-second president and his spouse, the Obama family presents an image of relaxed stability unrivaled since the depictions of domestic felicity in the "Four Freedoms" covers Norman Rockwell painted for *The Saturday Evening Post* during World War II. No longer do the White House private quarters echo with profane altercation or the furtive sighs of yet another illicit tryst. If the nuclear family needs a poster couple, the Obamas surely qualify.

Progressives exult and the Internet vibrates with voices urging the left to rally behind Obama's economic program. Here, for example, is *Nation* contributing editor Robert Borosage, co-director of the Campaign for America's Future, urging—I quote from the CAF news release—"progressives who helped deliver President Obama's electoral victory to rally around an historic opportunity to rebuild America." According to Borosage, "We are standing at the precipice of an historic period of reform.... This plan is a down payment on long-term investments in vital, core elements of the nation, including health care, education, infrastructure and sustainable energy."

Would that it were so! We are indeed on a precipice, but the signposts being set in place by the new administration point mostly in the direction of continued, if not accelerating, disaster. Is it churlish to come to this judgment when the inaugural bunting has scarcely been taken down? No. We have the evidence of Obama's mostly dismal cabinet appointments and the menacing outlines of his strategy to deal with the banking crisis.

The number of seemingly decent nominations has been pathetically small: Hilda Solis is a promising pick as labor secretary; Leon Panetta as CIA chief seems good. No doubt there are more among the hundreds of new officials. But the symbolism has been overwhelmingly negative. Obama has methodically surrounded himself with ranking members of the party of permanent war and with the economic strategists who blazed the path to the nation's present ruinous state.

With the possible exception of George Mitchell, who is on assignment for the president in Israel/Palestine, Obama has the usual passel of lobbyists for Israel at his elbow. Not nearly enough commotion has been raised about the grotesque decision to leave Robert Gates in charge of the Defense Department. Why not simply post a sign at the main entrance to the Pentagon: Open for Business as Usual? The Pentagon is the prime sinkhole of budgetary corruption in the economy, and even before Obama took the oath of office he flashed the message he wasn't going to lay a finger on it.

The progressives looked for comfort to the Agriculture and Interior Departments, which supervise vast slabs of the homeland. At Ag they got the former governor of Iowa, Tom Vilsack, who'd opposed Obama in the primaries and who is best known as a fanatical lobbyist for genetically engineered biocrops and ethanol. He's Monsanto's pinup boy and comes factory-guaranteed as a will-do guy for the agrochemical complex. Interior went to Colorado's senior senator, Ken Salazar. He's a born heel-clicker to the Money Power, always hatching deals with the coal industry and big ranching interests.

Though he would betray her, Bill Clinton appointed the estimable Joycelyn Elders as surgeon general. But who is Obama's pick as the nation's chief public health officer, to symbolize his priorities on healthcare? He put up a TV doc in the form of CNN's Sanjay Gupta, a shill for drug companies, an ignoramus about public health issues and a known foe of single-payer healthcare.

At almost every level, Obama's choices have been calibrated to appease the establishment.

The nation is in the midst of a fearsome economic crisis. Every week brings fresh indexes of accelerating catastrophe. The economy contracted violently in the last quarter of 2008 and is plunging. If Obama's plan to create or save at least 3 million jobs over the next two years works, it would still barely recover those that vanished over the previous two.

The core of the disaster is the collapse of the banks. It's not hard to envisage a course of bold, decisive action: Obama should confirm publicly that the banking system is in ruins, too far gone to warrant more injections of public money. The positive assets should be marshaled into nationalized banks, and the bad paper and stockholder equity dispatched to the knacker's yard.

Yet what are Obama and his pathetic treasury secretary, Tim Geithner, hatching up? Another trillion-dollar bailout package! Worse still, members of Obama's economic team are alerting reporters to their increasing enthusiasm for a so-called aggregator bank that would take over the banks' worst assets.

As in Europe, the left here should be on the streets, coaxing smoldering public fury at Wall Street into a blaze. As in the early '30s, there should be fierce Congressional hearings into Wall Street's crimes, not just a yap or two from Obama about bonuses.

Abroad, Obama heads toward quagmire and catastrophe, pledging to double the number of US troops in Afghanistan, converting a bogus hunt for Osama bin Laden into a wider war on the Pashtun tribes, seeping ever deeper into Pakistan. For those who entertained scant hopes for Obama-time, the reality thus far is worse than they feared. ■

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Katha Pollitt

The Kindness of Strangers

It's hard to believe, but there was a time not so long ago when charity was going to save the world. The right argued for a "compassionate conservatism" that would transfer the care and feeding of the poor from government to churches, while liberals, who saw government funds for good works shrinking, increasingly relied on the kindness of foundations and NGOs. Bill Gates, George Soros and other titans became masters of a burgeoning nonprofit universe, donating huge sums for healthcare, education, antipoverty programs and the bolstering—or creation—of "civil society" around the world. Bono was its troubadour and *Slate*, with its annual list of the sixty most munificent donors, was its scorekeeper. Bill Clinton, who famously proclaimed "the era of big government is over," was its impresario.

That philanthropic agendas might be skewed by pet enthusiasms or whims or ego was but a detail. Indeed, Warren Buffett was regarded as a mystifyingly self-abnegating saint because he gave $31 billion to the Gates Foundation instead of starting his own. Another detail: the use of philanthropy to mute criticism. Philip Morris used big donations to the arts to prettify its tobacco-stained corporate image. Rick Warren won acceptance, even from some progressives, for his work in Africa, even though that work also includes heavy proselytizing and alliances with pastors who stage condom bonfires and preach that faith in Jesus will cure HIV.

I'm for giving. I think tithing is wonderful. It's not a good economic moment to say this, but millions of Americans spend too much money on stuff they don't need and don't even really want, which is why it ends up squashed at the back of the closet or collecting dust on a shelf. Wouldn't it be better for everyone (except the makers and sellers of said stuff) if Americans gave more and saved more? After all, donating a book to a school library or a bag of groceries to a hard-up family generates as much economic activity as if you bought those items for yourself. If you have your shoes resoled instead of throwing them away, you save money and provide work for cobblers (a vanishing craft before this recession). I don't have a lot of time for leftists who won't give a quarter to a beggar on the street because it's up to the state to provide for such people: that beggar should shape up and join the ISO!

Still, the global economic crisis is showing how wishful was the notion that large-scale amelioration of drastic conditions—poverty, illiteracy, infant mortality—could be achieved by freewill offerings from well-intentioned individuals, even if those individuals happened to be billionaires. Like consumer capitalism, which relies on more and more people buying more and more things, philanthropy is an unsustainable model. Even in flush times of humongous returns on investments and much exuberant throwing about of cash, it could never do the jobs asked of it. In a downturn, nonprofits suffer along with the rest of the economy. Easy come, easy go.

Now we are seeing how vulnerable our patchwork of individually funded good works is to the vagaries of fortune. The collapse of Bernie Madoff's Ponzi scheme alone has caused at least $600 million in losses to Jewish charitable organizations, already struggling in the downturn. The *Jerusalem Post* calls the Madoff scandal "the most spectacular financial disaster to hit Jewish life since the Great Depression." Important foundations have folded, including the Picower Foundation, which was among the few to give significant sums to reproductive rights. Planned Parenthood has already laid off around thirty people, 20 percent of its staff. The ACLU, also a beneficiary of Picower as well as the now defunct JEHT Foundation, laid off thirty-six employees, 10 percent of its staff. The toll on hospitals, universities and the arts has been enormous. As Brandeis's major donors lost their fortunes to Madoff and shrank their pledges to the university, Brandeis decided to shut down its Rose Art Museum and auction off its entire collection to raise cash.

In the short run, more small donations can limit some of the damage: MoveOn.org appealed to its 5 million members for money to help four hard-hit organizations—the Brennan Center for Justice, Human Rights Watch, the Advancement Project and the Center for Constitutional Rights—and raised more than $630,000 in three days. Foundations that still have money are also pledging to help. But these are just stopgap measures; in major downturns, everyone, including small donors, eventually gives less overall.

The problem isn't limited to foundations. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria is being stiffed on pledges of around $5 billion from donor nations. It isn't that there's no money. The $4 billion in bonuses Merrill Lynch doled out in December (days before being taken over by Bank of America) could alone practically close the gap. In fact, as economist Jeffrey Sachs, who has powerfully advocated the responsibility of the rich North to the poor South, points out, Wall Street bankers have given themselves $18 billion in bonuses, paid for by government bailouts, to say nothing of parties, spa vacations, Super Bowl extravaganzas and, of course, their obscene salaries. Is there no way to get that money back and give it to help people who, literally, will die without it? If the awarding of fantastic wealth—in public money!—to a handful, no matter what happens to the rest of us, is really essential to the intrinsic workings of capitalism, the country is doomed, and so is the planet.

There's got to be a better way, and there is: it's called progressive taxation and enlightened social policy. The boom in philanthropy paralleled—and helped justify—tax cuts, shrunken government services and rising inequality. Appeals to the better angels of our nature are all very well. What we really need, though, are not random acts of kindness but concerted acts of solidarity. Perhaps the crisis will help us realize that poor people shouldn't have to beg for rent money on the Internet, and plutocrats cannot be counted on to come to the rescue. ■

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Naomi Klein

All of Them Must Go

Watching the crowds in Iceland banging pots and pans until their government fell reminded me of a chant popular in anti-capitalist circles back in 2002: "You are Enron. We are Argentina."

Its message was simple enough. You—politicians and CEOs huddled at some trade summit—are like the reckless scamming execs at Enron (of course, we didn't know the half of it). We—the rabble outside—are like the people of Argentina, who, in the midst of an economic crisis eerily similar to our own, took to the street banging pots and pans. They shouted, "*¡Que se vayan todos!*" ("All of them must go!") and forced out a procession of four presidents in less than three weeks. What made Argentina's 2001–02 uprising unique was that it wasn't directed at a particular political party or even at corruption in the abstract. The target was the dominant economic model—this was the first national revolt against contemporary deregulated capitalism.

It's taken a while, but from Iceland to Latvia, South Korea to Greece, the rest of the world is finally having its *¡Que se vayan todos!* moment.

The stoic Icelandic matriarchs beating their pots flat even as their kids ransack the fridge for projectiles (eggs, sure, but *yogurt*?) echo the tactics made famous in Buenos Aires. So does the collective rage at elites who trashed a once thriving country and thought they could get away with it. As Gudrun Jonsdottir, a 36-year-old Icelandic office worker, put it: "I've just had enough of this whole thing. I don't trust the government, I don't trust the banks, I don't trust the political parties and I don't trust the IMF. We had a good country, and they ruined it."

Another echo: in Reykjavik, the protesters clearly won't be bought off by a mere change of face at the top (even if the new PM *is* a lesbian). They want aid for people, not just banks; criminal investigations into the debacle; and deep electoral reform.

Similar demands can be heard these days in Latvia, whose economy has contracted more sharply than any country in the EU, and where the government is teetering on the brink. For weeks the capital has been rocked by protests, including a full-blown, cobblestone-hurling riot on January 13. As in Iceland, Latvians are appalled by their leaders' refusal to take any responsibility for the mess. Asked by Bloomberg TV what caused the crisis, Latvia's finance minister shrugged: "Nothing special."

But Latvia's troubles are indeed special: the very policies that allowed the "Baltic Tiger" to grow at a rate of 12 percent in 2006 are also causing it to contract violently by a projected 10 percent this year: money, freed of all barriers, flows out as quickly as it flows in, with plenty being diverted to political pockets. (It is no coincidence that many of today's basket cases are yesterday's "miracles": Ireland, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia.)

Something else Argentina-esque is in the air. In 2001 Argentina's leaders responded to the crisis with a brutal International Monetary Fund–prescribed austerity package: $9 billion in spending cuts, much of it hitting health and education. This proved to be a fatal mistake. Unions staged a general strike, teachers moved their classes to the streets and the protests never stopped.

This same bottom-up refusal to bear the brunt of the crisis unites many of today's protests. In Latvia, much of the popular rage has focused on government austerity measures—mass layoffs, reduced social services and slashed public sector salaries—all to qualify for an IMF emergency loan (no, nothing has changed). In Greece, December's riots followed a police shooting of a 15-year-old. But what's kept them going, with farmers taking the lead from students, is widespread rage at the government's crisis response: banks got a $36 billion bailout while workers got their pensions cut and farmers received next to nothing. Despite the inconvenience caused by tractors blocking roads, 78 percent of Greeks say the farmers' demands are reasonable. Similarly, in France the recent general strike—triggered in part by President Sarkozy's plans to reduce the number of teachers dramatically—inspired the support of 70 percent of the population.

Perhaps the sturdiest thread connecting this global backlash is a rejection of the logic of "extraordinary politics"—the phrase coined by Polish politician Leszek Balcerowicz to describe how, in a crisis, politicians can ignore legislative rules and rush through unpopular "reforms." That trick is getting tired, as South Korea's government recently discovered. In December, the ruling party tried to use the crisis to ram through a highly controversial free trade agreement with the United States. Taking closed-door politics to new extremes, legislators locked themselves in the chamber so they could vote in private, barricading the door with desks, chairs and couches.

Opposition politicians were having none of it: with sledgehammers and an electric saw, they broke in and staged a twelve-day sit-in of Parliament. The vote was delayed, allowing for more debate—a victory for a new kind of "extraordinary politics."

Here in Canada, politics is markedly less YouTube–friendly—but it has still been surprisingly eventful. In October the Conservative Party won national elections on an unambitious platform. Six weeks later, our Tory prime minister found his inner ideologue, presenting a budget bill that stripped public sector workers of the right to strike, canceled public funding for political parties and contained no economic stimulus. Opposition parties responded by forming a historic coalition that was only prevented from taking power by an abrupt suspension of Parliament. The Tories have just come back with a revised budget: the pet right-wing policies have disappeared, and it is packed with economic stimulus.

The pattern is clear: governments that respond to a crisis created by free-market ideology with an acceleration of that same discredited agenda will not survive to tell the tale. As Italy's students have taken to shouting in the streets: "We won't pay for your crisis!" ■

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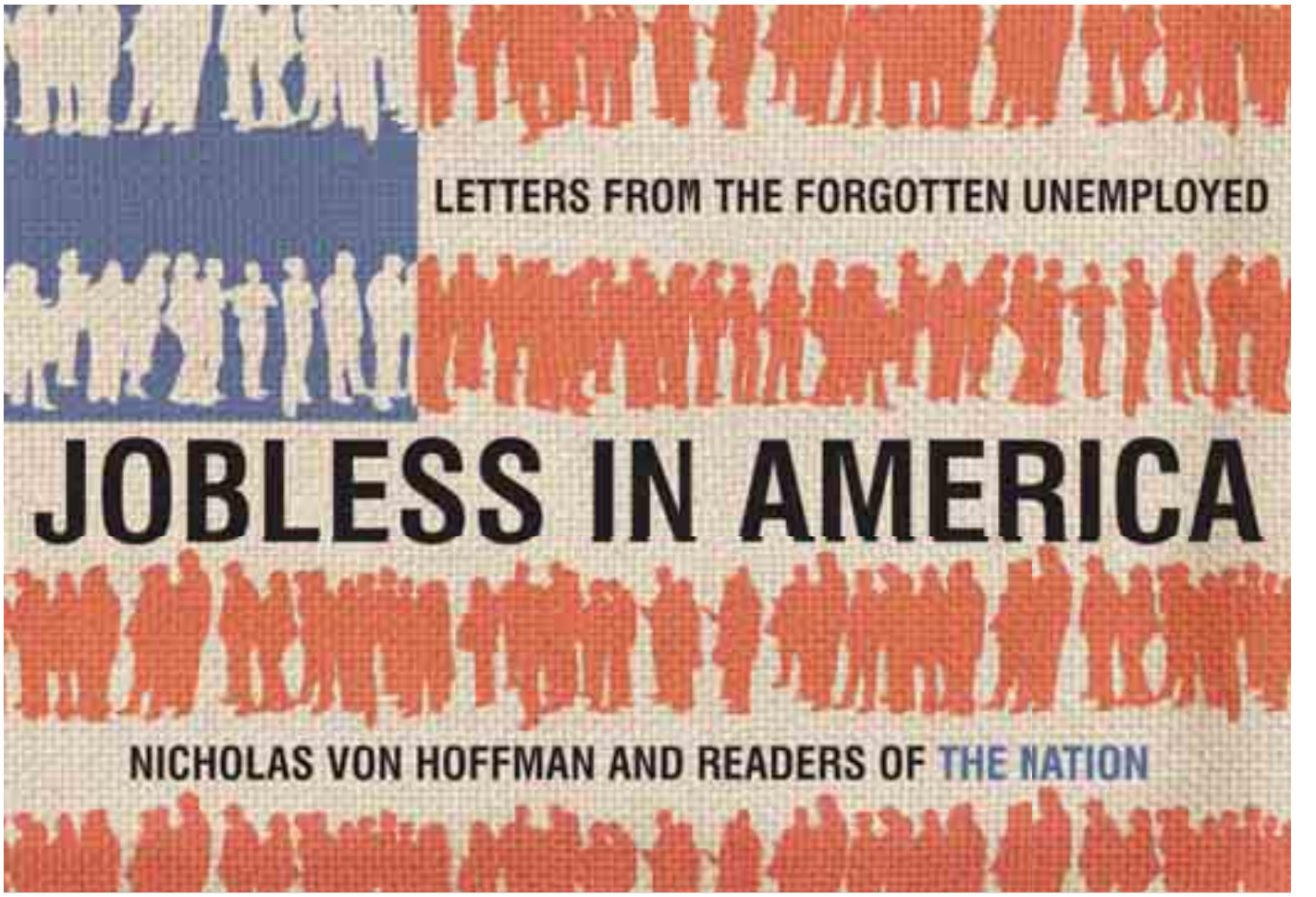

On January 27, at the end of a grim week of headlines announcing mass layoffs across the country, Nicholas von Hoffman posted a piece on the Nation *website titled "Lost Your Job? Tell Your Story." By turns sad and scathing, frustrated and furious, the testimonials poured in—what follows is only a sample. We encourage readers to share their stories by e-mailing them to nationjobs@gmail.com. Please go to thenation.com for the complete archive. —The Editors*

"I had just come back from attending the inauguration in Washington the day before I was told they were letting me go," a salesman named Robert Hinckley writes to *The Nation*. "My supervisor called me into his office and asked me if I believed in change. Before I could answer, he said he knew I did, since I was a big Obama supporter. Then he told me that the company thought I needed a change, since I didn't seem to be able to 'make my numbers' anymore."

In Maine there are skilled carpenters knocking on doors, asking for any kind of work, shoveling snow or stacking firewood. In Arizona Roger Barthelson, who has a PhD in biochemistry, says, "I am worried about losing my job, which pays about half of what the bottom-level salary is for someone with my experience—if I had a real job. Underemployment is bad enough. Now my little McJob may go away. Maybe I should retrain?"

Add that question to the one e-mailed to *The Nation* from "Anonymous" in Miami, who cries out, "Where are other people's stories? I have been looking online and, beyond this forum, they are nowhere to be found. Perhaps without an Internet connection, the worst stories will never be heard. Is that the reason for the silence?"

Every business day brings announcements of new layoffs at the big corporations. Layoffs in the small businesses, which comprise hundreds of thousands of jobs, do not get the publicity, but the consequences are the same—panic, worry, want and family disintegration. Animal shelters report that jobless people are bringing in the pets they no longer can afford to keep.

At the current accelerating rate of layoffs, we will be called on to deal with a catastrophe by the end of June. And at this time next year, the nation could be suffering 6, 7, even 8 million more Americans without jobs in a society singularly ill equipped to take on a disaster that many of the people in power thought could never happen.

Past recessions hit blue-collar workers and farmers the hardest and schooled them psychologically, if not financially, in alternating good times and bad. The white-collar wipeout is something new. We have no experience in handling the huge numbers of college-educated, technically trained unemployed.

Not only does unemployment ruin the lives of the people enduring it; it kick-starts home foreclosure rates and stimulates bankruptcies. The people who still have jobs, fearing that they could be next, stop spending money on cars, houses, clothes or anything else.

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The past century of depressions, recessions, slumps, panics, dips, slowdowns, busted bubbles and crashes shows that jobs are the last thing to come back, that employment is the slowest to recover. Every job lost postpones the return of prosperity.

This is the moment for a tourniquet on the job hemorrhage. News of the millionaire class using public bailout money for their bonuses and private airplanes has left people feeling stranded and furious. They are demanding that something be done for *them*.

Washington should get money out to the states so they don't have to cut payrolls. As the bill stands now, it does that in part with education and health, but it ought to go further and make up the billions in deficits that at least forty-six states are looking at and save the thousands of state and local jobs that otherwise will soon be lost. California is already requiring state employees to take two unpaid days a month; before we can turn our attention to job creation, we need to stop the layoffs.

Appropriation of money that cannot be spent immediately should be put off for another day. Transportation money ought to go into running more trains and buses now. Construction on new infrastructure should be postponed, and work crews should be sent out to do repairs now. If a project is ready to start instantly—be it a research proposal, childcare or a theater group—put money into it now.

There are also some tax schemes that might have an immediate effect on job retention, such as Martin Feldstein's proposals to offer tax credits on the down payments on houses and automobiles. This is the time to make employing people as inexpensive as possible—a temporary suspension of the FICA payroll tax would save employers huge sums and put more money into paychecks. Another step might be to allow employers to double their tax deductions on nonexecutive salaries.

The operative word is "now." We must save the jobs we have and then go on to create new ones. Please send your stories and those of your friends so that the faces of the people whose way of life is collapsing are known and their voices are heard. The talking heads, professors, passing celebrities, politicians, experts, analysts and the barking seals of talk-radio and all-news television must not be the only ones who are heard.

* * *

'People no longer had credit cards that worked'

I lost my job a week ago. I was working for a software company here in Southern California, selling educational programs and expecting people to come up with $170 over the phone and give out a credit card number. My manager assured me every day that our business was recession-proof. He said that people will always want to help their children, especially where their education was involved.

Unfortunately, the people I was calling no longer had credit cards that worked. It was sad to listen to some of the stories from people who had just lost their jobs, were expecting to or were worried about losing their homes to foreclosure. When I told them this was a very important purchase, they'd tell me they were more concerned with keeping their home or putting food on the table. Every day I went to work it became more difficult to make the sale. Then I was fired—for not getting enough sales each week. My partner is retired and on Social Security. He also gets a small pension. My income, however, was necessary. We do not know how we are going to pay the bills now.

James Kavanagh
San Diego

'Is the George W. Bush Library hiring?'

My original career choice was to be a history professor. After a few years in graduate school, I decided that a career as a librarian or archivist would be more sensible, considering how long it takes to get a PhD and the student loan debt I was racking up. I graduated from library school in the summer of 2007 with $80,000 in debt and had begun my job search months earlier. I moved from Iowa to Oregon to live with my family while I continued to search for a job. Because my mother is also a librarian, she was able to get me a temporary part-time job at her library for five months.

In April 2008, I finally landed what seemed to be a really great job as a corporate archivist in the suburbs of Washington. I knew that this job was risky, as the company provided archival services for corporate clients, and the economy was already faltering. I remember the CEO of the company announcing in a meeting that we always did well during economic downturns due to the fact that we outsourced archives and were cheaper for a company than hiring a full-time archivist. A co-worker also told me not to worry about the economy because we had a financial backer who supported us whether we were profitable or not. I didn't really believe either of these statements because we were rapidly losing clients and not gaining any new ones.

On January 14 I was told that because I was the last one hired in my department, I was to be laid off. I had heard about the procedures for layoffs, but still I was surprised by how I was treated: I had to clear my desk immediately (my computer was already locked), and my co-workers could not even look me in the eye, nor did my boss say goodbye. I have not heard from any of them since that day, and I don't expect to.

It saddens me that so many people of my generation are in the same boat: overeducated, underemployed and in over our heads in student loan debt. It is hard not to be angry at my parents' generation for their years of out-of-control consumerism and lax regulations. Fortunately, a lot of us are ready and willing to work hard to right so many wrongs.

What I need most from the government is health insurance (my coverage ends today) and extended unemployment benefits if I don't find a job within three months. It also wouldn't hurt if libraries and archives received more funding. By the way, is the George W. Bush Library hiring yet? I'll be the first in line.

Kate Stewart
Centreville, Va.

'Probably applied for about 200 jobs'

I am a married 35-year-old man with two young children at home. About three years ago, I made the decision to return to college and finish my bachelor's degree with the hope that it would help empower me to achieve more than the low-paying jobs in which I have worked for most of my adult life. I attended a top university, UC Berkeley, while working part time. I graduated with a bachelor's in history with honors.

It has been just over a year since I graduated, and I cannot

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find a full-time job. Believe me, I have been trying. I have probably applied for about 200 jobs at all sorts of companies, from Starbucks to Google. The closest I have come to landing a job was when I made it to the second interview for a County Department of Public Health analyst position. But before I knew what hit me, the county froze the position because of budget constraints.

I cannot express how discouraged I am at this point. My family and I are basically surviving off public assistance. I want to work and do my part, but nobody will hire me. I just do not know what to do.

Dean Stankiewicz
Berkeley, Calif.

'At least we are better off than a lot of people'

My husband had a promising career ahead of him when he began with Cleary Building Corp. (pre-engineered structures, such as barns and outbuildings) as a sales specialist three years ago. After his first year with the company he was ranked number two nationally in first-year sales. But then the economy started to change. In 2007 his sales plummeted, as did his base salary, from $335 per week to $250 per week. In 2008 his base salary dropped to a dismal $200 per week, to support a family of four. Less than minimum wage.

Finally, in October, he was let go. Cleary then tried to deny his unemployment and withheld his last paycheck. We had to solicit the assistance of our local Representative, Diana Fessler, to assure his unemployment. Cleary appealed the decision once his unemployment was granted.

The worst part of this layoff is that my husband carried our family's health insurance. With my two part-time jobs, I make just over the amount allowable to put my children on Medicaid. Luckily, Ohio has a plan that if you keep your children uninsured for six months, you may be eligible for a buy-in health plan through the state. But what about those six months? Do you want your children to be uninsured for six months?

On New Year's Day I went to a party with some old college friends. I discovered that one of them had been laid off from Miller-Valentine, where he had worked for more than twenty years. He was the sole support of his family of five. I think at least we are better off than them, than a lot of people. I still have a job.

Gail Ruhkamp
Laura, Ohio

'Class war has begun'

I have been laid off since September 5. I am an electrician with IBEW union membership. Although I work from a pool of workers on an "out of work" union list, we have seen no new calls for some time. Last fall, before I was laid off, there were few wind-farm jobs available. I am a 54-year-old woman, so I feel the outlook for a decent-paying job, or any job, is growing quite dim. I am collecting unemployment, and thank God for the extension allowed by the federal government. I do have a little in savings, but I fear the day may be nearing when I must use it for monthly payments. My husband is still employed, but this could change at any time, as no one seems safe. My worst fear is not that I will have to work for a lesser wage—it is getting into trouble with my mortgage.

Who knows where tomorrow may take us? We have been truly wronged by the greed of many, the lack of good stewardship of our government, the attempts of many to continue this damage. It all turns back to greed. Corporate America no longer represents American interests, as it is owned by outside interests and the hunger for big profits. This country was built on the people's strength to revolutionize against those who wrong us, and soon this may be necessary again. Class war has begun.

Sue Oelkers
Red Wing, Minn.

'My little McJob may go away'

After being laid off from a slowly dying biotech company at the end of 2001, I looked for a job for a year but had trouble even finding a reasonable job to apply for. My wife and I moved to Tucson in 2003, and I took the third postdoc of my career because that was what was available. I have now moved up to assistant research scientist, which is essentially super-postdoc. So far, very little grant money has come through for me, and my boss is getting squeezed, as our state government looks with glee at the idea of cutting back expenditures on all education.

Arizona is already number forty-nine in the fifty states for money spent on education. We're going for fifty. The idea of killing government and cutting taxes is still big in this largely Republican state, and Janet Napolitano, the one adult in state government to provide some moderate supervision, is gone. We're now stuck with an almost all-Republican government. As education funding gets cut, my co-workers and I get more and more nervous about losing our jobs. So, even though I'm 54, have a PhD in biochemistry from the University of Pennsylvania and twenty-five years of productive research and teaching experience in cell biology (including drug development), I am worried about losing my job, which pays about half of what the bottom-level salary is for someone with my experience—if I had a real job. Underemployment is bad enough. Now my little McJob may go away. Maybe I should retrain?

Roger Barthelson
Tucson

'I received no severance, no unemployment'

For more than fifteen years I worked as a proofreader of textbooks, from college chemistry on down. The company was at first family-owned, then it was bought by a national firm, and then that was bought by an international corporation based in New Delhi. Can you guess where this is going? The Los Angeles office was closed in December.

Because I was an independent contractor, I received no severance, will get no unemployment compensation and forget about COBRA health insurance, which is not affordable anyway to the unemployed. I have little hope of finding such specialized work at all, much less at the hourly rate I was paid. Here in California, the official unemployment rate is now 9.3 percent, but that doesn't include people like me, and there are a lot of us.

W.K. Grady
Los Angeles

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'There will be a revolution'

I was a successful senior writer/instructional designer with more than twenty years of hard-earned experience, and I lost my job on November 19. I worked for BBDO, an advertising agency whose primary customer in the Detroit area is Chrysler. I had a good salary, good healthcare for my family, benefits like a 401(k) and paid time off. That's all gone now, and my family and I are struggling with the realities of this new situation we find ourselves in.

The managers and politicians are only focused on their next quarterly earnings or their next re-election bid and don't seem to understand that the loss of my job doesn't only affect me and the ones I love—it affects every business my family and I come into contact with. How and where will I and millions of others find jobs like the ones that have been lost? With no job, how can I afford to buy a new American vehicle or TV or shoes for my son or food for our next meal?

The people that we've elected, and those entrusted with this nation's corporate and financial assets, better get it together fast because soon those questions will be resonating a million times over, and the noise from the masses may well topple the walls surrounding their gated communities and country clubs and rattle their gilded cages. We were told, Work hard, play by the rules, and pay your taxes and you will get ahead—you will have the so-called American Dream. That's a damn lie, and I for one am mad as hell about it. God help those in charge should I and the millions of other people like me (our numbers seem to be growing exponentially by the day) reach a point of desperation and no return. There will be a revolution and no redemption for the people who caused this mess.

Joris B. Rapelje
Clinton Township, Mich.

'I save seeds'

Because of a couple of chronic illnesses, I've ended up cleaning houses to get by. As my customers lose their jobs or have salaries slashed, my income is also being whittled away. Because my husband has a job that still has health insurance, I am not a good candidate for disability. Because my husband is a well-skilled carpenter, his employer is able to get him jobs a couple of days a week if we're lucky. This week, there is no work.

Because my husband has work at all, he can't qualify for unemployment. The unemployment office doesn't even take calls every day. The answering machine at the local office said to call back in a few days just to get information. So we both look for work, hoping to find something that will get us over the next hump, something that will enable us to pay our household expenses.

I have been putting off treatments for my health conditions that could possibly make me more functional—even with health insurance, the treatments are too expensive for me at this time. We also have four pets acquired during better times, and I am terrified whenever their health needs attending to; I'm sad to say that I am often forced to take care of their health problems myself.

I've organized a documentary movie night so my friends have something cheap that they can do on the weekend and a place where we can gather together as a progressive community. Next movie night, I'm showing a film on the healthcare crisis. At this time in history, we all have to strive to be one another's teachers and be there to support one another. Even though I've never been a churchgoer, I know what it is like to pray every day for the simple necessities. I have a victory garden now. I save seeds. I hope that our struggles will soon pay off.

Paulette Kenyon
Pleasanton, Calif.

'Embarrassed to be a foolish American'

A year and a half ago, I was working as a carpenter in Boston making over $30/hour plus a reasonable benefits package. Now I am laid off; so is almost everyone I used to work with. I can't even find a job for $15/hour without benefits. I have exhausted my unemployment insurance and will probably end up landscaping for $12/hour in the spring. I thank all the politicians in Washington who were looking out for my best interests and all the Wall Street lobbyists who also had my best interests in mind when they paid (read, *bribed*) the aforementioned politicians to deregulate banks so that they could swindle the workers of America. Let the markets run free until there is no money left. Then the government can step in and pick up the tab. No regulation when there is a profit, but socialism when it all falls down. Unless there is a revolution soon, I am moving to Europe. There won't be a revolution, though—all the sheep will just keep investing in 401(k)s and taking it in the you-know-what. I'm embarrassed to be a foolish American.

James M. Rich
Peabody, Mass.

'Is it pride—or shame?'

I am an Ivy League graduate with a master's in architecture who has been self-employed for nineteen years. I am in an increasingly precarious position without any safety net. Architecture work has dried up since September, and there is no government help for the self-employed. At 58 years old, I cannot find affordable health insurance. I am a renter with no family and, because of a health problem four years ago, no savings. I can possibly keep this up for eight more weeks. After that, I have no idea what is going to happen. (Actually, I do, but it's unthinkable.) I have a beautiful 2-year-old pup that I dearly love. I know I should make plans to rehome her, but I just can't bring myself to do it yet. I could stay in my current circumstances on only $2,200 a month, yet there is nothing coming in.

Where are other people's stories? I have been looking online and, beyond this forum, they are nowhere to be found. Perhaps without an Internet connection, the worst stories will never be heard. Is that the reason for the silence? Is it pride—or shame? I despise the greedy bastards who got us here, and they are still being rewarded for their malfeasance. It's sickening beyond belief.

Anonymous
Miami

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The People's Sheriff of Chicago

A tenant protest compels Cook County's Tom Dart to suspend foreclosure evictions.

by JOHN CONROY

RYAN INZANA

Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart, like his counterparts across the nation, has been evicting people from their homes in ever increasing numbers. In 2008 the Chicago Democrat and his deputies conducted 4,487 court-ordered mortgage foreclosure evictions, an increase of 153 percent over the office's 2006 numbers. But on October 8 Dart stood before TV cameras and said he'd had enough. Criticizing banks and mortgage companies as heartless, careless and taking advantage of taxpayers, he suspended all mortgage foreclosure evictions. Suddenly Dart appeared to be the kind of lawman Tom Joad might have clapped on the back.

In a recent interview Dart said that over the summer he'd become aware that the eviction orders increasingly lacked evidence of the due diligence the banks were supposed to perform. In one instance, he said, his deputies arrived to evict residents from a building that no longer existed, and in other cases they found residents had documents showing they were rightfully in the house. "It was a disaster," he said. "Just complete chaos out there."

The tipping point came with the crisis at 4914-16 North Spaulding, an apartment building full of Hispanic immigrant families in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood. Mihail Stancu, a Romanian immigrant, had purchased the building in October 2006 under the guise of MKST Enterprises, and he'd gone on to become the kind of owner Tom Joad might have clapped on the head with a shovel. According to City of Chicago senior assistant corporation counsel Steven McKenzie, Stancu's corporation sold the seven units as seven condos, the buyer being Stancu himself, who'd borrowed from seven lenders. Stancu was then in possession of a lot of cash and a lot of debt, and according to McKenzie the Romanian simply abandoned the latter, pocketing as much as $1.2 million, after which he disappeared. McKenzie, who has filed charges against Stancu, reports that the fugitive has been spotted in Spain and Romania.

Stancu had regularly collected rents from his tenants, but the collections stopped after about a year. Unable to reach the owner, tenant Esteban Cruz, an immigrant landscaper and gardener, began collecting the rents, paying for repairs and utilities, and depositing the remainder into a bank account belonging to Stancu. None of the tenants were particularly worried until May 28 of last year, when what seemed to be an eviction notice was posted on the front door and on the mailboxes of all the units. A second threatening notice followed shortly thereafter. Cruz brought the paperwork to the offices of the Albany Park Neighborhood Council. APNC recognized the notices as bank-generated, not court-generated, discovered the condominium ruse and laid out the problem before a housing court judge. The judge recognized that the best course was to put the building into receivership and try to find a single buyer who would convert the condos back into affordable rental housing. Armed with that decision, the tenants should have been safe.

But the eviction threats continued. A locksmith arrived and told one family they had thirty minutes to vacate. APNC organizer Emily Burns fended him off. Not long thereafter, Sheriff Dart's deputies pounded on the door of apartment 1A, demanding entry, armed with eviction papers. They left after finding the family was not listed on their papers, but according to Burns, they said they'd be back in a week to put the family out. Alma Aquino, who works as a cashier at a restaurant in the Loop, says she went to work every morning afraid that her family's possessions would be at the curb when she got home. Her parents, visiting from Mexico, asked what they should do if the deputies came back. "I say, 'Just don't open the door, and call the police.' But my father said, 'They *are* the police.'"

The APNC decided the sheriff was the problem, and on August 13 the council staged a protest rally in Daley Plaza, denouncing the sheriff, after which APNC board member Diane Limas and six of the Spaulding tenants, including two children, walked into Dart's office asking for a meeting. Three of Dart's aides sat down with the delegates and promised to investigate. Sheriff's spokesman Steve Patterson recalls that within about two days of the protest, Dart said, "You know, these people are right."

On October 8, with the APNC's Burns and Limas in attendance, Dart announced he was suspending mortgage foreclosure evictions.

"These mortgage companies only see pieces of paper, not people, and don't care who's in the building," Dart said. "They simply want their money and don't care who gets hurt along the way. On top of it all, they want taxpayers to fund their investigative work for them. We're not going to do their jobs for them anymore. We're just not going to evict innocent tenants. It stops today."

There was some furor in response, particularly from the banking industry; one prominent member denounced Dart as a vigilante. But Richard Gottlieb, a lawyer who chairs the legislative committee of the Illinois Mortgage Bankers Association, says the policy wasn't so radical at all. "It was all about

John Conroy (jconroy329@aol.com), a Chicago journalist, is the author of Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People: The Dynamics of Torture *and* Belfast Diary: War as a Way of Life.

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being more humane to the people who had no idea that there was even a foreclosure action against the property. And it was the right thing to do, because people weren't doing it right." Gottlieb points out that for more than a decade, Illinois law has required the listing of all residents on motions for eviction and eviction orders, and it is likely that for years, sheriffs have been breaking the law by evicting people whose names have not been listed. "Dart basically did this to force the hand of the courts and the foreclosure lawyers to get it right.… In the end result, there was nothing terribly troubling about what occurred."

In the wake of his announcement, Dart sat down with the chief judge of the Chancery Court and worked out new procedures; the suspension ended ten days after it began. Dart, however, is still receiving paperwork filed before the new procedures were imposed, so he has continued to reject orders. Between October 20 and January 13, he received 232 requests for eviction, and he performed twenty-four. Part of his slow pace can be explained by the annual holiday moratorium on evictions and by cold weather (if it's fifteen degrees or colder at 6 AM at O'Hare Airport, no evictions take place). But it also appears that Dart, enjoying the camaraderie of the Joad camp, has no great enthusiasm for getting back up to speed. He and APNC housing leaders met in mid-January to work on proposed legislation that would require eviction orders to list each occupant's birth date. Dart's intention is to have a social worker present if children or seniors are being evicted so they can be informed of available social services.

In the meantime, the Spaulding tenants have continued to receive threatening notices from banks and their agents. By mid-January, eleven such notices had been posted. But Jack Markowski, president of the Community Investment Corporation and the receiver appointed to administer the building, thinks the residents will be able to stay for years to come. Markowski says the CIC has discovered more than 200 buildings in the city, an estimated 2,000 units, where the same scheme has played out, usually with a very different outcome: after the landlord/condo developer absconds, no one pays the building's utilities; shutoffs result and tenants leave; squatters and/or drug dealers move in; and finally mortgage bankers from different institutions, successful with their foreclosure motions, discover that each owns one unit in a vacant, trashed building. According to Markowski, such buildings have no value in part because no lender is in charge, and reassembling it as a single entity is not the province of a loan officer in a single bank and too much work for the possible return in a depressed market. So the building is boarded up, taxing the police, the patience of the neighbors and the value of surrounding property.

Thus the Spaulding Luxury Condominiums are more than the site of impressive fraud and more than the impetus for reform in the county's eviction process. They are also the site of a small urban miracle, performed by an immigrant landscaper and his fellow tenants, who decided to save a building they didn't own. ■

Toxic Coal in Tennessee

The Tennessee Valley Authority has become a poster child for the failures of self-regulation.

by KELLY HEARN

Even after a wall of toxic coal sludge roiled through her lakeside neighborhood, Linda Tarwater considered herself lucky: her home, unlike those of some neighbors, wasn't washed away. But then came all the talk about contamination, of toxins locked inside the muddy mixture of water and coal ash, a byproduct of coal burning.

"When they told us everything that was in that ash, I was shocked," she says. "They say the ash has all these toxins, yet the TVA says there's no danger."

The Tennessee Valley Authority is the federally funded electric utility that produced the ash, mixed it with water and stored it inside a forty-acre holding pond at a plant in Kingston, Tennessee, some forty miles west of Knoxville. On December 22 an earthen dike collapsed, releasing 1.1 billion gallons of the muddy waste, which knocked houses off foundations and poured into the Tennessee River basin, which feeds municipal drinking-water systems. TVA and EPA officials scrambled to

WADE PAYNE/AP

Homes destroyed by the TVA's December coal ash spill in Tennessee

Kelly Hearn is an investigative reporter whose work has been funded by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and the North American Congress on Latin America. Research support was provided by the Puffin Foundation Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.

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test drinking water, quickly assuring residents that all was safe. Since then, TVA surface-water tests have consistently shown little to no threat of contamination downstream. Despite these assurances, the largest industrial spill in American history has become the emblem of an industry run amok, of regulatory failures and of a controversial effort to depict coal as a benign energy source.

"This spill is the argument against 'clean coal,'" says Dan Volz, assistant professor of environmental and occupational health at the University of Pittsburgh. "There's been a nationwide campaign by the coal industry to promote the use of clean coal. But clean coal is an oxymoron." Volz says it's true that new technologies can limit atmospheric emissions. "But the law of conservation of matter means that the toxins that don't go into the air simply get transferred to wastewater and coal ash," he says. "If a toxin is in a lump of coal and you burn it, it has to go somewhere."

Millions of tons of coal ash—laden with toxic substances, including arsenic, selenium and mercury—are produced each year. A large percentage of the dry ash is sold to companies as an industrial ingredient to make products like cement, concrete and mulch. But a lack of federal regulation and the patchwork nature of state laws mean utilities are all but free to decide what to do with the ash. "Unfortunately, the cheapest way to dispose of coal ash is to mix it with water and dump it into unlined lagoons," says Ben Dunham, associate legislative director of Earthjustice. There are more than 1,300 dumps across the country like the one that failed in Tennessee. And most, experts say, fall under little or no regulation. Even though the ash contains toxins the EPA has determined are dangerous for drinking water and public health, the agency has twice declined to declare ash a hazardous waste. As a result, there has been no federal regulation of coal ash and little monitoring of groundwater, which studies show can become contaminated through leaching. "For years, utilities have been largely free to do what they want," says Kert Davies, a research director at Greenpeace.

The TVA, the nation's largest utility, has become a poster child for the failures of self-regulation. Dave McKinney, chief of the environmental service division of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA), told *The Nation* that aerial photos show two-thirds of the ash remaining in the failed structure "has no proper containment." TVA spokeswoman Barbara Martocci says that some ash lodes remaining inside the lagoon are the same height as the ash that broke away in December. "But it's not a threat. What's left is just sitting there," she says. "Even if parts of it fell off, there's not enough energy behind it to go anywhere." She says workers were in the process of "smoothing the pile down so nothing can fall off." Another problem for the authority is that it is prohibited by environmental regulators from putting the re-collected ash back in the failed pond, and there's no long-term plan for storing it.

Meanwhile, public health concerns are growing. "The biggest threat by far is that the wet ash will dry to dust and release breathable particles," says coal ash expert Tom FitzGerald, director of Kentucky Resources Council. The prospect of an emergency deepened on January 28, when Duke University scientists reported that exposure to radium- and arsenic-containing particulates could have severe health implications. "The levels of radioactivity we measured in the ash are almost twice the level the EPA reports for typical coal ash," says Duke geochemistry professor Avner Vengosh, who added that the difference results from the type of coal that's burned. "What we know is that right now the ash is wet. But if it is allowed to dry and become a dust, it will contain particles and could become a public health hazard." In that situation, Vengosh says, living near the ash dust "would be the equivalent of living in a house containing radon."

Officials at the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation say their agency and the EPA are installing air monitors to complement the TVA's air monitoring. TDEC spokeswoman Tisha Calabrese-Benton says the authority is working to prevent "fugitive dust emissions," in part by covering ash with straw and planting seeds to grow "temporary ground cover." But Chris Irwin, an attorney for United Mountain Defense, accused the TVA of using air-quality monitors that failed to meet TDEC and EPA standards. "The TVA has no idea what they are doing," he says. "Letting it handle the testing and cleanup is like letting the burglar come to the scene of the crime and dust for prints." Calabrese-Benton says the TVA is operating a high-volume monitor and is adding additional equipment.

> 'There's been a nationwide campaign by the coal industry to promote…clean coal. But clean coal is an oxymoron.' —Dan Volz, U. of Pittsburgh

Concerns have centered on water contamination. In the immediate aftermath of the spill, the EPA found high levels of arsenic in some spots in the Emory River, but officials assured residents that water-treatment facilities would "most likely" remove toxins before they reached the tap. According to EPA spokeswoman Dawn Harris-Young, the agency has stopped conducting surface-water tests, instead relying on the state to conduct tests that determine impacts on aquatic ecology rather than on levels of drinking-water contamination. In the weeks since the accident, the TDEC and TVA have consistently reported little to no contamination in highly affected areas downstream from the spill. Yet two private groups told *The Nation* their data show arsenic levels many times higher than what the TVA has reported. One of them, Appalachian Voices, a local conservation group, claims to have tested on the same day and at the same river mile marker as TVA field scientists. "But our values from that day are 310-fold over what the TVA reported," says Donna Lisenby, a river monitor for the group.

Experts suggested that such large differences may be explained by the fact that ash plumes don't spread evenly throughout a river—samples from inside a floating plume will reveal greater contamination than those taken in cleaner water. For Linda Tarwater, whose house was spared, all the assurances in the world don't change the fact that a glass of water from her kitchen sink has a gray film on top. "Even though they tell us the water is fine," she says, "we've stopped drinking it." She says at least eleven people who live closer to the ash are complaining

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of breathing problems, burning eyes and itchy throats.

Early on, TVA officials suggested the spill could have been caused by heavy rains and freezing temperatures. But McKinney of the TWRA says the TVA failed to drain water properly from the structure. He also says the authority failed to monitor hydrology inside the containment pond and test its structural integrity after fixing small leaks. "There were no regulations that forced them to keep track of the hydrology as the ash piled up and put pressure on the failed slope," he says. "And no law forced them to use engineering techniques to get a big-picture look at things after they plugged holes." When asked about the claims, TVA spokeswoman Martocci says the authority has hired independent experts to determine the cause of the spill.

With outrage building, Congress is rushing to regulate. The Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing in January that led to promises to regulate coal ash. In the House, Representative Nick Rahall has put forward a bill to establish uniform federal standards for disposing of coal combustion products, and newly appointed EPA head Lisa Jackson told the Senate in her confirmation hearing that the coal ash issue would be on the front burner for the agency.

Lobbyists see storm clouds. "The utility industry recognizes that some sort of regulatory structure or guidance is going to come," says David Goss, executive director of the American Coal Ash Association. His affiliates are heading to Congress with "technical information that demonstrates clearly that coal combustion products are not hazardous materials and that their toxicity is similar to comparable products used in everyday settings." Volz scoffs at this idea. "Nobody with even a rudimentary understanding of environmental science can ignore the scores of ecological studies that show toxins in coal ash damage aquatic ecology," he says. "This spill has exposed the coal industry's dirty little secret, which is that nobody knows what to do with all of this coal waste." ■

Mail Matters

Postal policies favor junk mailers and big media over political opinion journals.

by RICHARD R. JOHN

Like so many institutions, public and private, the United States Postal Service is facing a financial crisis of monumental proportions. To help it weather the storm, Postmaster General John Potter recently appealed to Congress to eliminate six-day delivery and restructure the accounting treatment of its long-term healthcare benefits. No prominent lawmaker so far has urged Congress to bail it out. Yet by almost any criteria, the Postal Service has a better claim on federal support than Bear Stearns or General Motors. For more than two centuries, postal policy has safeguarded civic engagement through administrative protocols so arcane that they almost never find their way into textbooks on constitutional law. This is unfortunate, since these protocols have long sustained the political journalism that is a bulwark of the Republic.

RYAN INZANA

No republic can hope to endure without civic engagement informed by the political journalism of publications like *The Nation*. The best-known safeguard for the press is the First Amendment. Until the twentieth century, however, this constitutional provision had little practical import. Far more consequential, though far less heralded, were the institutional safeguards for the press that the founders enshrined in postal policy.

George Washington and James Madison had much to quarrel about in the 1790s. Yet they agreed that the low-cost circulation of periodicals in the mail promoted civic engagement in public affairs. Though postal policy subsidized all publications, large and small, it was structured to encourage small-circulation journals of opinion. Journalists like Horace Greeley supported preferential postal rates not only for large-circulation periodicals like his own *New York Tribune* but also for the many smaller publications that he believed the government had an obligation to sustain.

All this changed in 1970, when Congress established the Postal Service. No longer would Congress set postal rates and no longer was Congress the final arbitrator of postal policy. Authority over rate-making shifted from Congress to the Postal Service, while jurisdiction over postal policy devolved on the Postal Regulatory Commission (PRC) by virtue of its jurisdiction over the interpretation of postal law.

These shifts are reflected in a recently released PRC study of postal policy that Congress requested as part of a comprehensive overhaul of the Postal Service. The report proposes no radical innovations. It concludes that most Americans are satisfied with the level of postal service they currently receive and recommends no major changes in policy. More significant is what the PRC report leaves out. Nowhere does it address the media firestorm over the huge recent rate hikes for small magazines, and only in passing does it highlight the growing public dissatisfaction with the proliferation of advertising fliers known as junk mail—an issue with obvious environmental

Richard R. John is a professor of history and adjunct professor of communication at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His publications include Spreading the News: The American Postal System From Franklin to Morse. *As a consultant for the Postal Regulatory Commission, he recently prepared a history of the postal monopoly and universal service, which can be found at prc.gov/PRC-DOCS/library/USO%20Appendices/Appendix%20D.pdf.*

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implications that is currently a hot topic in Europe, and that is also rapidly finding its way onto the public agenda in the United States.

Most significant, the PRC report affirms the post-1970 transformation of the rationale for the Postal Service. Gone is the broad, dynamic and open-ended civic mandate of the founders. In its place is a narrow, static and content-neutral legalism known as the "universal service obligation." Before 1970 postal policy remained attuned to the needs of the citizenry; since 1970 it has become increasingly beholden to package carriers like FedEx, with which the Postal Service has contractual relations, and mass mailers like the media giant Time Warner, which rely on the Postal Service to deliver their magazines.

Why have we strayed so far from the intentions of the founders? PRC commissioners point to changes in the information infrastructure, including, predictably, the rise of the Internet. Postal executives, for their part, are preoccupied with the multibillion-dollar deficit that the Postal Service faced last year and is certain to confront this year as well.

Technology and economics are but part of the story. No less fundamental is the radical experiment in social engineering that has been recently undertaken by postal executives with the connivance of the PRC. The founders championed a flexible civic ecumenicalism highly favorable to newspapers and magazines. Postal executives and PRC commissioners, in contrast, have begun to embrace a rigid market fundamentalism that matches the cost a sender pays to mail an item with the cost of its delivery, with little regard for its content.

One milestone in the recasting of postal policy occurred in 2007, when lawyers and economists working for Time Warner persuaded the PRC to authorize a rate adjustment that permitted magazine publishers to retain a much larger share of the cost savings they had generated through the adoption of high-volume sorting, packaging and shipping techniques best suited for mass-circulation publications like *People* and *Time*. While ostensibly fair-minded, this ruling led to huge cost increases for more specialized magazines like *The Nation* and *National Review*, which proved unable to take advantage of these cost-saving techniques. This differential treatment occasioned a sharp protest from small magazines across the political spectrum. Victor Navasky at *The Nation* was incensed, and so too was Jack Fowler at *National Review*. And with good reason: the postage bill for *The Nation* and *National Review* increased overnight almost 20 percent; for many small magazines, the increase was even greater.

What is truly scandalous is not that Time Warner prevailed on the PRC to cut its mailing costs but that it failed to make common cause with the rest of the press and champion the institutional safeguards that have long sustained civic engagement. Let us hope that the incoming administration demonstrates a higher regard for the intentions of the founders by reaffirming the civic mandate of the Postal Service to promote the informed discussion of public affairs, a mandate that remains the most compelling justification for the monopoly privileges that the Postal Service has long enjoyed. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

less. It's not often that someone can just nail it the way she did. Thank you!

Bruce English

Sorry—But Your Ideas Are Timid

Brooklyn, N.Y.

As a principal of a socially responsible investment firm, I was surprised that your economic "Ideas for a New Era" [Jan. 12/19] were so timid. While it is important to provide green jobs, improve our infrastructure, enact healthcare for all and begin to reverse our incredibly inequitable distribution of wealth, it is inadequate. We are not going to stimulate and spend our way out of this crisis. Nor is the answer to turn Chinese and Japanese workers into debt-ridden consumers by having them spend their savings to stimulate and drive the world economy. We would do far better to follow the Chinese example of building the new economic infrastructure alongside the old, inefficient state-owned industries. This approach strengthens domestic demand during the transformation. In our case, our goal should be to replace privately owned industries based on cheap hydrocarbons with new, sustainable enterprises.

This is a transformational moment. We must comprehend that we are moving from a world of abundance to one of scarcity. This is not the 1930s, with vast unexploited natural resources and a comparatively small global population. In this era, natural resources are being depleted and are vigorously contested through price and war. We must immediately retool our economy and our lives away from disposables and suburban sprawl. We must accept the true cost of energy, even if it means steep carbon taxes to shift our markets to renewables. We need a vision that builds sustainability into our new, smart infrastructure, green from the ground up. We must go way beyond what is being proposed to ensure the future of our children.

Steve Fahrer

Pioneers of Black History

Washington, D.C.

Kim Phillips-Fein's review of Wendell Pritchett's *Robert Clifton Weaver and the American City* ["Living for the City," Jan. 12/19] refers to President Johnson's initial reluctance to appoint Weaver as the first housing and urban development secretary (and the first-ever black in the cabinet). Johnson may have been mindful of what happened to President Kennedy when he signaled that he would appoint Weaver to head his proposed Department of Urban Affairs. Many Southerners in Congress decided they didn't need such a department, especially if it was to be headed by an African-American.

Those of us in the Housing and Home Finance Agency (HHFA) at the time of its transition to HUD had a different problem: how to pay Dr. Weaver. The HUD Act was signed September 9, 1965, and provided that officials of HHFA (of which Weaver had been the administrator) could serve up to sixty days, which expired November 8, 1965. Since President Johnson had not nominated a secretary for the new department, Weaver's status was unclear. The General Counsel's Office, always creative, came up with the idea that the HHFA was lapsing, and Weaver could continue to be paid as the administrator of the lapsing agency. Weaver was finally confirmed as HUD secretary January 18, 1966, probably not long before he would have submitted his prepared resignation.

Laurence Pearl

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Books & the Arts.

KATSUMI KASAHARA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

A stock index display in Tokyo on September 16, 2008, the day after Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy

Crash Landings

by BERNARD AVISHAI

"We sometimes, for example, hear it said," writes John Stuart Mill in his *Principles of Political Economy*, "that governments ought to confine themselves to affording protection against force and fraud"; that people should otherwise be "free agents, able to take care of themselves." But why, he asks, considering all the "other evils" of a market society, should people not be more widely protected by government—that is, "by their own collective strength"? Much like Mill, Paul Krugman likes capitalism's innovations but not its crises and thinks that government has a duty to facilitate the former and protect us from the latter. He doubts that citizens will get much protection from moguls—or from most economists, for that matter—unless we trouble to grasp how the whole intricate game works, so that our legislators will form a consensus about how to regulate it. Mill supposed that we needed to see "the Dynamics of political economy," not just "the Statics." Krugman knows we need *Liquidity Traps for Dummies*.

So for the past twenty years Krugman has dutifully mapped the patterns, worried the numbers and issued his warnings—as in (now we can say it) his seriously underestimated book *The Return of Depression Economics* (1999), a primer on the financial busts of Japan, the Asian "tigers" and Latin America, transparently meant to caution Americans about their own vulnerabilities. He could not have chosen a worse time for prophesy than the end of the millennium. Technology markets were booming, Google was just a year old and Enron was voted a *Fortune* "Most Admired Company" (for the fourth consecutive year). Meanwhile, a budget surplus was accruing, and the Clinton White House, the Federal Reserve and Congress were all in agreement that, say, regulating "credit default swaps" would be an insult to the professionalism of investment bankers.

The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008
By Paul Krugman.
Norton. 191 pp. $24.95.

What about the problems that had recently hobbled other economies? Would not Wall Street rehearse Japan's recession? Then again, most thought, what did the Japanese, with their computerless offices and hierarchical *keiretsu*, have to do with entrepreneurial, Lotus Notes–enveloped us? Mexico's politically inbred financial institutions? What board member of an American insurance company—wired with information, faithful to shareholder value—would allow its executives to underwrite high-risk bets, or indeed

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any transactions, without appropriate reserves? I was, at the time, director of intellectual capital at KPMG International, designing a worldwide intranet for auditors and consultants; our news filters were programmed to cause any story with the word "Greenspan" in it to leap onto 100,000 desktops. The digerati, successive presidents of the United States—Andrea Mitchell, too!—seemed under the spell of the old Atlas's shrugs. But young Krugman, I was told (and might here and there say), didn't "get it."

The Return was, as things turned out, the last book Krugman published before breaking onto the *New York Times* op-ed page, from which he has persisted in calls for predictability, simplicity and safety for salaried citizens who have better things to do than maximize their utilities all day long. Krugman championed single-payer healthcare; he hammered away at Dick Armey's tax cuts and Karl Rove's winning creepiness; after the 2004 elections, he almost single-handedly shamed wavering Republican moderates into abandoning their president's proposal to let Aunt Sheila risk chunks of her Social Security on the stock market. Since 2006 he has become a kind of John the Baptist of our Keynesian resurrection, warning as early as a year ago that an Argentine-style crisis was looming because global investors would eventually learn that Americans, too, were unfit to soak up much of their surplus savings, that US financial markets were "characterized less by sophistication than by sophistry."

Now he has reissued *The Return*, which he has shrewdly subtitled and hastily updated—in part, I suppose, to say, "I told you so" (and to make a buck from a different kind of derivative), but mainly to reiterate what he has argued all along: that any financial institution we dare not let fail we also dare not leave unregulated; that a commonwealth must use its powers to spend and invest and especially to promote growth when more or less free markets more or less inevitably let us down.

Any financial institution we dare not let fail, Krugman argues, we also dare not leave unregulated.

For a slender book, *The Return* is ambitious—actually, it's three polemics in one. The first sketches out the ways financial capital in Asia and Latin America flowed, or didn't, to cause sudden recessions, or inflationary spirals, or currency devaluations, or all of these at once. Various governments, even those trying to play by the rules of fiscal conservatives, were confronted with terrible choices: either decline to print money, endure recession and let ordinary people suffer now; or print money, discourage investment and cause them to suffer later. The second polemic draws parallels between what happened in these places and what might happen—actually, what *is* happening—in America, Europe and more developed parts of the world, suggesting what dislocations to expect and remedies to pursue. Krugman sighs when thinking about economists—including, notably, his Princeton colleague Ben Bernanke—who assumed that officials at Treasury and the Fed had evolved the means to reduce economic imbalances to the point where regulations could be relaxed and the term "business cycle" would seem an anachronism.

The third polemic, the thinnest and most implicit of the three, consists of arguments scattered throughout the book regarding how changes in the "real economy"—the businesses that actually make, transport and design things—shape financial markets or are shaped by them. How, in particular, might revolutionary changes in information technology—producing changes in the structure of corporations and their terms of competition—yield a changing financial pattern? Or how might those changes entail a revised superintending of the business cycle? Krugman allows, for example, that the globalization of industrial markets and their much higher rates of productivity—both the result of a new, pervasive information platform—might have justified Greenspan's unwillingness to hike interest rates after the "irrational exuberance" of the dot-com bubble, although low rates, both men knew, were bound to sustain the value of houses—in effect, risking an even bigger bubble. Krugman writes that it was clear by the 1990s "that the information industries would dramatically change the look and feel of our economy."

Still, Krugman doesn't much go into how the new technology worked or spread, speeding up big businesses or lowering barriers for small ones. What mattered, so he writes, was the sheer visibility of cool technology, the "romance" of a new American industry—the fact that high-tech start-ups made entrepreneurship seem admirable "in a way that it hadn't for more than a century." The Berlin Wall had been torn down, and business magazines "actually became interesting to read"; even radical economic theorists were lulled into a "new sense of optimism about capitalism," he writes. Krugman's argument here is all about perceptions, psychology. What interests him, mainly, are the financial traces left by investors acting on assumed changes in the commercial environment; and what compels him is how governments might respond to any consequent exuberance.

I suppose it is clear by now that the first of *The Return*'s polemics strikes me as the most fully satisfying of the three. And if the third were better—as good as Krugman could have made it—the second would be even more convincing. Make no mistake, the trenchancy with which Krugman explains capitalism's dysfunctions—the fall of Thailand's baht, the smooth corruptions of Mexico's PRI—is reason enough to read the book; these sections will embarrass blinkered proponents of laissez-faire, IMF austerity and Laffer curves, if the headlines have not already. Yet at the risk of rekindling the vanities I indulged at KPMG, I am not sure Krugman, or macroeconomists more generally, fully appreciate the technology revolution that's hit the real economy in recent years—you know, the business innovations whose details that other *Times* columnist sweats.

A generation ago, as Duke University's Arie Lewin discovered, it took about thirteen years for a third of the *Fortune* 500 to be "selected out"—to fail or be acquired. Before the current crisis, this took about four years. Two generations ago, about 60,000 businesses started up in the United States every year; before the crisis, that number was closer to a million. As Don Tapscott and Anthony Williams show in their fascinating series of case studies, *Wikinomics*, the collaborative power of the web is now every start-up's R&D department (and every book reviewer's fact-checking department). Even in 1999, perhaps 70 percent of the market value of technology businesses was booked as "intangible assets"—reputation, and the capacity to innovate—and more than 50 percent of profit came from offerings introduced in the previous year. These changes drove KPMG auditors a little crazy; they were not only relevant to the "look and feel" of the economy but also to the questions of what generates global financial gyrations, how governments might respond effectively and what turns a recession into a depression or makes a depression "great."

Krugman starts by explaining why bad things happen to good people, presenting a simplified model of financial crisis, borrowed (he acknowledges) from Joan and Richard Sweeney's famous 1977 article in the *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking*—about, of all things, a

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baby-sitting cooperative in Washington, DC. The co-op was established by savvy Capitol Hill professionals, whose decency and respect for rules could not be doubted. It issued scrip to govern member obligations—some of which couples got upon joining—entitling bearers to a half-hour of baby-sitting. Members, not surprisingly, earned scrip by sitting for a corresponding time. So far, so good. But then statics became dynamics. Couples with free evenings might try to accumulate scrip "reserves." More heavily programmed couples might run low and want to sit for many evenings in a row. Demand was greater than supply on weekends. (You get the idea.) And what Krugman shows, with geometric logic, is that we get a peculiar monetary crisis, a kind of "liquidity trap": "Couples who felt their reserves of coupons to be insufficient were anxious to baby-sit and reluctant to go out. But one couple's decision to go out was another's opportunity to baby-sit; so opportunities to baby-sit became hard to find, making couples even more reluctant to use their reserves except on special occasions, which made baby-sitting opportunities even scarcer." The co-op, in short, went into recession: the fact that members were rational—that is, that they wanted to be prudent—made the system of exchange seize up; as with the current crisis, everybody wants to save for the future and wants everybody else to "go shopping."

Krugman shows that the co-op executive was able to allay the problem by putting more scrip into circulation (the Sweeneys' article goes on to show that this ultimately led to the "scourge of inflation," but never mind). The parable's first lesson, or "take-away," is not terribly contentious. What such financial perturbations need is a kind of gyroscope, government monitors to throw compensatory weight around: a central bank to lower or raise interest rates, in effect determining the amount of money in circulation, or a ministry of finance to, say, peg the currency or allow it to float. What is more contentious is Krugman's basic skepticism about the monetary conservatism of, say, the IMF in such cases—a skepticism fair-minded readers will come to share. Presumably, if the co-op had wanted an IMF loan to buy a laptop, it would have had to promise never to increase the amount of scrip coming out of its little print shop.

Much of the rest of *The Return* is a series of stories about government efforts to intervene the way the co-op executive did, though the playful tone understandably disappears. Krugman presents countries wracked by crises during the 1980s and '90s—Mexico, Argentina, Japan, Thailand and Indonesia. In every case, one finds the same disturbing, circular pattern—financial problems for companies, banks and households; leading to a general loss of confidence among (usually foreign) investors; leading to a plunging currency, rising interest rates and a slumping economy; leading to financial problems for companies, banks and so on.

The most fascinating crisis (anyway, the one many of our mutual funds lost money on) was Thailand's, from which Krugman means us to draw some sobering lessons about Wall Street—especially about what economists call, a little pretentiously, "moral hazard." Thailand, a latecomer to the Asian miracle, was changed in the early 1980s from an agricultural economy largely by Japanese businesses situating factories in the country. So peasants moved to urban jobs, local banks and businessmen began to invest in new construction and the economy started growing by 8 percent a year. Global capital markets responded: after all, communism had been defeated, and interest rates were very low in Japan and Europe. By 1997, $256 billion was flowing in to emerging markets, especially Southeast Asia.

Just how did money get from Tokyo to Bangkok? This is a central element of the plot. A Japanese bank might lend to a Thai "finance company" that bundled imported yen, converted it to baht and lent it in turn to local real estate developers—who were, of course, paying for materials and wages in baht. This led to a growing demand for baht and should have made its value rise—assuming the currency had been allowed to float. But to attract investment to its hitherto neglected part of the world, the Thai government had decided to maintain a stable rate of exchange between the baht and the dollar. So the Bank of Thailand increased the supply of baht and simultaneously bought foreign exchange—increasing its reserves. Unavoidably, it also expanded domestic credit, since banks in which the converted baht were deposited became eager to lend. All of which meant new financing for construction projects, which brought new foreign lending and so on.

The inevitable result was a construction bubble. The Bank of Thailand tried to dampen things a bit by borrowing back much of the baht that wound up in foreign banks. But this stopgap only drove up domestic interest rates, making borrowing from abroad even more attractive and bringing in more yen. The central bank might simply have let the baht rise, as many American economists are insisting the Chinese yuan should today. But this would have meant making Thai exports (the stuff Japanese companies had come to assemble) more expensive in foreign markets—in effect, killing the goose to slow the production of golden eggs.

Then again, too much gold brings tragedy of a different kind. Eventually—Krugman beautifully lays this out—surging investment (such as imported equipment for construction) and consumer spending (imported TVs and cars for newly affluent Thais) slowed export growth relative to imports. This created a huge balance-of-payments deficit. Thais began using foreign currency loans to pay for imported consumer goods, while the central bank used its foreign currency reserves to defend the baht. In July 1997 the Thai expansion finally reached its limit; the economy began imploding. The central bank, its reserves depleted, let its currency go: the value of the baht against the dollar fell as much as 50 percent over a few months. This proved catastrophic, engendering a recession not only in Thailand but in Korea and Malaysia as well—a kind of sympathetic pain, as global investors pulled back in panic. The region began to experience what countries as different as Argentina and Israel had suffered in the 1980s.

What does Thailand's story have to do with "The Crisis of 2008"? A lot. Sure, the profiles of Thailand's and America's economies are very different: if we were, much like the Bangkok middle class on its binge, spending more than we were earning (and covering the trade deficit by increased international borrowing), we hardly imported stuff the way the Thais did. Much of our trade with China, for example, has been internal to world-

Dust in a Word

We go in and out of doors
that's who we are
next question?

What rules?
I never understood
just what or what not

The plan is the mind
whose hand
how far

And so more
than you know
than you'll ever

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spanning American companies, which capture the value of designing and marketing a product, and go to China only for common components and final assembly. Also, the US economy is more resilient than a dozen Thailands: Krugman notes particularly the incomparable mobility (he might have added *upward* mobility) of American labor. And the American government has not had to defend its currency the way the Thais did. The dollar has been the world's reserve currency since World War II; its decline has only meant that American extravagance reduced the wealth of the planet's middle classes about as pervasively (and, until now, imperceptibly) as our SUVs increased its atmospheric carbon. We still count on the Chinese middle class investing back in our capital markets a good part of the $2 trillion Chinese manufacturers have accumulated exporting to us. ("The saving grace of America's situation is that our foreign debts are in our own currency," Krugman wrote last year.)

Still, there are important symmetries in the performance of financial players. Thailand's crisis was fueled by middlemen who had every interest in maintaining the illusion that investments in construction and retail could not fail: people who profited from the deal-making but not necessarily from the viability of the projects. Go back to those Thai "finance companies" that brokered loans for foreign investors. The people who ran them were mostly the relatives of ministers and other high officials. They were not financial whizzes but reasonably supposed that the Thai government would force taxpayers to bail out companies whose loans went sour. At the same time, their political connections were a balm to investors. On the whole, they profited from the upside, making fortunes that encouraged them to keep making loans, while feeling insulated from the downside—alas, until the whole artifice collapsed, by which time they were rich anyway. Nor did they really face moral hazard; they took other people's money and were not at risk if their decisions were reckless or dumb.

The investor complacency engendered by Thai connections may not be quite like that engendered by AAA ratings, though ratings often masked sweetheart connections between, say, Moody's and its clients. But if the profits of the "finance companies" remind you of the profiteering of mortgage companies making insufficiently vetted housing loans—or, for that matter, of investment banks selling faux-securitized bonds and their derivatives—well, you may be forgiven. Wall Street, as Krugman has recently noted in his column, became a scramble for good placement in a Ponzi pyramid: business students of mine who'd gone to investment banks and were, after a few months, looking for openings in hedge funds did not speak of hazards, moral or otherwise.

Which brings us to another predatory financial player—one that will attack Western economies as readily as emerging ones and that can make any crisis worse. I am referring, of course, to hedge funds, which grew into a dangerously big part of an almost entirely unregulated "shadow banking" system: institutions that take your money and promise eye-bulging returns but have no regulation. Krugman reminds us of the astonishing growth of hedge funds, beginning with the legendary assault by George Soros's Quantum Fund on the British Exchequer in 1992; that speculation so weakened the pound that John Major finally opted out of negotiations to adopt the euro, and his government fell. Before the 2008 crisis, ordinary banks managed something like $6 trillion; shadow banks (investment banks and hedge funds) managed about $4 trillion, $1.8 trillion of which was managed by hedge funds.

Hedge funds, it turns out, not only face moral hazards: they force hazards on all of us.

Hedge funds, it turns out, certainly do face moral hazards; indeed, they force hazards on all of us. When they win, "shorting" notionally vulnerable currencies and equities, they greatly amplify the flaws in any country's monetary policy or corporation's financial strategy. But when they lose—and, Bernard Madoff's scheming aside, Krugman thinks their collapse may be the next shoe to drop—they expose wide circles of investors, including pension funds and university endowments, to speculative disasters. All fund managers, like CEOs, are rewarded for their gaining above-average returns, but how can all returns be above average? These are the waters in which hedge funds prey. And Krugman is right to insist that real wealth may be destroyed by the inevitable collapse of investment pools, not just the ethereal wealth of "high net-worth individuals." When times were good, the paper losses of funds might recover in weeks. But when losses are big enough, and panics wide enough, they engender slumps in production, employment—happiness—for a whole nation.

What is the way out of crisis? Governments, Krugman shows, are left with contradictory choices. As the only driver of demand left standing, governments become indispensable investors. And he thinks recovery is bound to be prolonged. In his book and his journalism, Krugman stresses the importance of very large investments: in infrastructure, healthcare, education—autos, too—insisting that these be big enough to overwhelm depression, systemic and psychological; that the worst mistake would be taking a five-foot leap over a seven-foot pit "out of fear that acting to save the financial system is somehow 'socialist.'" The usual conservative pundits will carp about this, warning us about not going too far. But who among them seriously disputes Krugman's claims for massive state intervention?

Still, we cannot really understand what the state needs to do unless we understand how forces outside the financial system drive the real economy these days. What investments should government make apart from recapitalizing, reregulating and reprivatizing banks? How to invest in "infrastructure"? This part of *The Return* is sketchy and leaves one wondering if stories about developing economies help that much. Some of the book's asides will seem cavalier even to the people featured in those "interesting" business magazines a few years back.

There are two points I wish Krugman had made in the book, things he seems to believe based on much of what he has written and said about the auto industry in recent months. The first is that emerging countries may be like us in the circulation of financial capital but are quite unlike us in the circulation of intellectual capital—the more important kind, after all. To recover, those countries focused mainly on their financial systems because they were keen to attract not just foreign money to their capital markets but the know-how of global corporations to their cities. The key was to turn foreign investments in plant complexes, or software houses, or management teams, into engines of civil society, so that a new class of globally competitive entrepreneurs might be born. Intel's impact on Israel's Kiryat Gat, like Motorola's on China's Tianjin, is something like MIT's on Cambridge. You would not know this from *The Return*.

But macroeconomics as a profession often seems indifferent to the ways production innovations drive economies, at least compared with ambient financial conditions. You imagine macroeconomists advising farmers to concern themselves mainly with forecasting the weather. Krugman writes, for example, that one could not explain the yen's wild fluctuations during the past twenty-five years

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by "measurable changes" in Japan's fundamentals. But surely you cannot explain what made Japan so filthy rich in the late 1980s, and so susceptible to a ridiculously huge real estate boom (and a ridiculously strong yen), unless you consider its striking advantages in paternalistic, labor-intensive and quality-focused manufacturing in the 1970s and early '80s. What *Harvard Business Review* article in the 1980s did not begin with a bow to Japan's "competitiveness"?

Then again, can you explain the yen's fall, or Japan's prolonged crisis despite massive infrastructure investments, if you don't see that, indeed, new process technologies governed by robotics and software advances seriously undercut those older advantages, boosting European but especially American entrepreneurship; that the very paternalism that made Japan's 1980s factories hum also made employees hard to fire and information-driven start-ups rare? What if somebody in the co-op had invented a robot to baby-sit? What if members could conduct negotiations, or auctions, directly through Facebook? "A thing not yet so well understood and recognised," Mill wrote, "is the economical value of the general diffusion of intelligence among the people."

Which brings me to the last point. What has allowed emerging markets like Thailand and China to grow incredibly fast, and thus accelerate major financial imbalances, is the same information platform that will inevitably shape and pace our recovery. Lehman Brothers collapsed, and we got into global panic at the speed of light. But this was because the same platform that allowed investment banks to dice up and bundle mortgage debt in the first place narrowcasted specialized reasons for panic to every segmented country and industry, pension fund and CFO. What venture capitalist in the world was not reading Sequoia Capital's gloomy presentation on retrenchment in tech markets the day after it was delivered in Silicon Valley?

But why cannot this same platform, which gives entrepreneurs unprecedented powers to inform themselves, speed review of their business plans, hire new talent and so forth, be counted on to get us out of recession, however deep, at unprecedented speed? Why should state buttresses to financial services and investments in the real economy not accelerate business formation? Should not Obama's new, sturdier regulations, as well as his tax policies, give priority to entrepreneurs? Indeed, what venture capitalist will not also know within twenty-four hours about Kleiner Perkins's next investment in, say, a battery company—and, within an hour, be telling a friend managing the medium-risk portfolio of a sovereign wealth fund in Qatar?

Think again about carmakers. A competitive auto group—Volkswagen Group, for example—amounts to a global, virtual design center, sharing talent and intellectual property across brand units: Audi, Skoda, etc. The boss's job is to bring down overhead and transaction costs, something like the mogul of an old-time Hollywood studio; the goal is to enable multiple experiments, for myriad tastes and geographies, so that a brand's niche products can break even when, say, only 50,000 vehicles have been sold. More than 60 percent of the cost of an automobile is in the "bonnet," the cab and electronics, not in the drivetrain; and most drivetrain components are increasingly computerized. So Volkswagen Group survives because its burgeoning information platform enables its brands to establish multiple hubs for sharing intellectual capital—hubs for deciding about aesthetic and performance features, of course (a Skoda Octavia is not an Audi TT, though both share the same chassis), but also, increasingly, for software refinements invited by suppliers. Usually, Audi's designers set performance specifications but get an ever expanding roster of suppliers to compete on designing technical specifications. BMW, Tapscott and Williams tell us in *Wikinomics*, manages its marketing and supplier relationships and maintains only critical in-house engineering expertise. A web of suppliers does the rest—even, in some cases, the final assembly.

The Return gives us little to think about along these lines. So read it on the train, and take *Wikinomics* or William Taylor and Polly LaBarre's *Mavericks at Work* to bed. Then again, when Krugman writes in his column about the auto industry, describing a cluster of networked suppliers any bailout is really meant to sustain, you get the idea *Wikinomics* and some other new economy books have been on his night table, too. He knows, clearly, that whatever the government does—in healthcare and education, too—it must take into account that hundreds of fast, smart companies growing bigger will be the key to recovery, not a few established giants getting a makeover.

What made the Great Depression great, after all, was the time it took big businesses to be jolted into high activity. But we do not do business with gold transfers, patent monopolies and shortwave anymore: big does not mean trusted, or controlling, or informed. We've heard Santayana's aphorism, and many have been condemned to repeat it. But there are things to learn also from the present. And we count on nobody more than Paul Krugman to teach us about that. ■

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BENJAMIN FRIEDLANDER

Kevin Davies

Happy Thoughts!

by JORDAN DAVIS

Are you better off than you were four years ago? This is, for better or worse, the fundamental question of American politics. It is a trick question. In *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia*, Canadian-American poet Kevin Davies observes that the average answer would be about the same if the number of years was replaced with eighty or, for that matter, 13,000:

> Yesterday? I stayed in out of the
> heat, washed dishes
> Read a book
> Remembered a cow
> That as an ignorant boy with a
> board I walloped
> For breaking into our yard
> Eyes first puzzled then pissed off
> Bellowing near my asparagus patch
> Or was that later
> After the big cedar fell and
> destroyed the fence
> Or possibly when we mutinied,
> refusing to follow
> Alexander farther into the
> subcontinent
> Just wanting to go back to whatever
> inevitably temporary homes

Jordan Davis's poems have appeared recently in Fence, Gulf Coast, Northwest Review *and* The Nation.

The Golden Age of Paraphernalia
By Kevin Davies.
Edge. 142 pp. $11.

> With the baubles we'd collected and
> our blistered skins
> Eat an entire sheep with a group of
> cousins
> Maybe build a hut
> Imperceptibly alter a grammar
> Chase birds
> Stand in the midst of barley

In Alexander's army, no doubt, there were Macedonians given to specifying the quantity of sheep eaten at a feast. There may even have been some given to introspection and malingering. I vouch that none practiced diachronic linguistics. It is a joke, and one dry enough that if a comedian were to tell it, critics would say it passes for poetry. When a poet is dry, though, it's news.

The occupational hazard of working in metaphor is that nothing can ever simply be itself. Even poets' definitions of their function in society take the form of sullen comparisons. Percy Shelley saw poets as "unacknowledged legislators," and T.S. Eliot remarked that "the poet aspires to the condition of the music-hall comedian." Though Davies will likely be appalled to hear it, he often achieves both bogies, writing poems that one can easily imagine being

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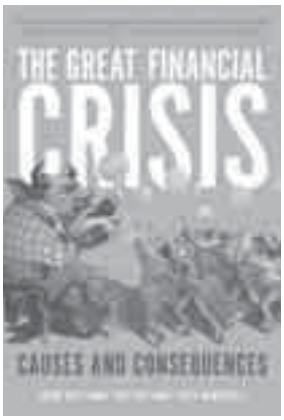

THE GREAT FINANCIAL CRISIS
Causes and Consequences

John Bellamy Foster
and Fred Magdoff

"The financial crisis of 2007-08, and with more certainly in store for 2009 and beyond, is one of the great calamities of modern neoliberal capitalism. But it should come as no surprise for regular readers of John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff's writings over the past few years in *Monthly Review*. In a series of highly accessible and cogent articles, they have consistently explained both the build up to the crisis and its consequences. *The Great Financial Crisis* brings their ideas together in one place. It is compelling reading for anyone seeking to both understand and change the world we live in today."
—**ROBERT POLLIN**, Professor of Economics and Co-Director, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts-Amherst

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declaimed by John Cleese or Al Franken.

Since the decline of patronage and the rise of the English department, high-minded poets from Ezra Pound and Charles Olson on through the Language poets have spent much of the energy they might otherwise have devoted to vocables and sense to writing essays of noisy, semicomprehensible worry—about poetry's place in society, society's place in poetry, poetry's place in poetry. Davies's poetry is mercifully free of that kind of self-regard, which it has replaced with an even better, more archaic form of self-regard: alienation and self-loathing. This is actually a promising development. For all its proclaimed devotion to negativity, the poetic avant-garde has until now had no curmudgeon with the charm or persistence of a Philip Larkin or Dorothy Parker.

In the twilight of what our major critics agree is "the Age of Ashbery," genial surrealism has gradually replaced grand mania as the period style (a shift that tracks the change in Ashbery's manner over his past seven books). I'm not saying it's easy to make funny poems. For starters, the jokes have to be funny. Then, too, the poems have to be good. Often poets take this second condition to mean that the jokes must turn out sad. More often, they take both rules as guidelines. It doesn't have to be that way. There are poets (Ron Padgett, Paul Muldoon and Alice Notley come to mind) who routinely succeed on both counts when they choose to. Frederick Seidel would be the funniest living poet if his jokes didn't entail bodily harm. August Kleinzahler would be the funniest living poet if he were funny. Some poets are humorous, if not quite funny, while others have the opposite problem. For his part, Davies is glumly oblivious to the issue.

As with the best stand-up routines, Davies's best poems sustain the reader's attention without providing context, narrative or any kind of framework beyond our unstable environment, the perennial duplicity of authority and the waste to which our psychosocial landscape has been laid. Surely there are some readers who have been conditioned by at least the past eight years to share this perspective: and for them, this poetry says it's OK to laugh about it now.

Or is it? Davies has a gift for finding bad news in every section of the newspaper and delivering it with lines broken to induce maximum wince: "Something/put in the gas/to make the air better/has made the water worse." "The mayor's city's/almost up to code/aside from asbestos grade schools and rotting projects/of a previous order." A compassionate nihilist, he goes easiest on the section of the paper that chronicles failure every day without exception: "It has been a year/of missed extra points in the landscape/of college football." The bad news recombines in the dreamlike way it often does in poems, only this time, to borrow Freud's terminology, the day residues are instantly familiar and nearly intact: "Spider silk in the milk of goats," "Refusing to acknowledge/the legitimacy of the mudslide," "Let's bury radioactive garbage in the desert for/several thousand years/Or shoot it at the moon/and Mars along with bacteria,/see what happens." Happy thoughts!

Nanotechnology is a favorite subject here, specifically the fear that self-replicating microscopic robots will knit themselves into a gray goo that destroys all life. This is a token of a more general fear of the subliminal, of loss of control. Rather than dismiss these fears as so much irrational death wish, like a good American, Davies burrows into them to the point where they almost imperceptibly alter his form. He is a master of off-the-rack avant-garde tropes, such as parataxis, in which non sequitur is the basic rule for getting from one sentence to another. He is especially handy with allusion and substitution. Robert Frost's remark about home ("Home is the place where, when you have to go there,/They have to take you in") is transformed into "That place/where/when you go there/they have to cast you out." Edward Lorenz's butterfly effects and tidal waves become "a moth/in New Zealand, rustling the ear hair/of Franco triumphant in Madrid, letting loose/the vampire priests, the werewolf nuns." The ultimate hero of this line of argument is Herman Melville's one-man strike, Bartleby, whom Davies recasts as "load-/bearing walls composed of particles/that prefer not to."

Critics have charged contemporary poets with neglecting the unity of the individual poem in favor of presenting a consistent and recognizable style—a brand, if you will, more or less extruded into slightly differentiated shapes on the page, which they update and repackage every few years in a new book. Despite originating with Camille Paglia, it is a fair criticism and one that at first glance could apply to Davies. Davies therefore does the comically astute thing and turns the liability into a book-length joke.

The table of contents in *The Golden Age of Paraphernalia* lists five poems. Three of those poems, however, are listed without page numbers. Instead, each is keyed to a character: a bullet dot, a vertical dash, a number sign. Sections of the poems are interleaved throughout the book, each bit identified by its signature character, a textual equivalent of the station-identifying logo in the bottom right of the screen: "we'll have the younger scholars working/on | the Bush crime spree for generations"; "If/it isn't sex/why are we thinking about it? • Our prosimian ancestors/less than one ounce,/ankles smaller than rice grains./Scooped up and eaten by owls./Having just done the/wild thing"; "13./You can tell/a lot about/A dialect/by how it uses pigs in insults."

While it's possible, once you catch on, to follow each poem by flipping forward, as if reading a choose-your-own-adventure in which you have no choice, there's not much more to be gained than by reading the book straight through. In either case, the effect is that of watching TV while someone else pilots the remote—maddening, then soothing, then maddening again. If you've made it this far in the review, you're probably one of the few people who would read these shuffled poems in your own idiosyncratic way, perhaps back to front, sideways or alongside the work of another poet.

There is, however, and *pace* Paglia, a work, a single poem, at the heart of this book. A twenty-six-page tour de force of indirection, vituperation and rhetoric for rhetoric's sake, "Lateral Argument" borrows force from the desperation-inducing corporate career phrase "lateral move," shorthand for stagnation and deprivation. It is a cheerful title, as was *The Waste Land*. Pitched somewhere between Sisyphus and Prometheus, the poem begins as all good long poems do, with an epigraph: "Persons exist/as practical ways of speaking about/bundles." This is attributed case-in-point fashion to Paul Williams, a name belonging to no fewer than seven authors as well as several musicians ("Just an Old Fashioned Love Song") and more than a few English footballers. From the opening line ("They awoke in a bookless world…") it's all alienation, all the time; by line eight Davies is asking, "Who here has access to liquor"; and it's only the third page when he hits what for most dark-night-of-the-soulers would be rock bottom:

> The papier-mâché Potemkin
> village we've spread, spreadable
> cheese over the surface of
>
> what we call Earth.
> There's a space. You fill it,
> but it's not you.
> You're not it
> either—in fact you're not you.

Four pages later, however, Davies investigates the possibility that this is a literal alienation: "Suppressed memory: We have all survived crash landings,/wandered here and invented plausible pasts…" If you're expecting him to carry the candle to the back wall of the cave and shine a flashlight on the

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primitive drawings of a plausible past, be assured that it is cave—and irony—all the way around. But in marked contrast to the rest of the work in the book, "Lateral Argument" only resembles a monologue at the Comedy Store of the damned. As with the other poems in *Paraphernalia*, context and narrative are AWOL, and the speaker's negative whimsy is left alone to fill the space. And this time it does it in as shapely a manner as anyone has outside a Mike Leigh film.

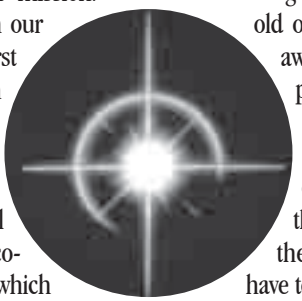
Using epistrophe, anaphora and other parallel list forms, Davies piles humiliation on absurdity like a punk rock Thomas Bernhard: "We could build an entire civilization,//but that would be a mistake./It is impossible to make a mistake./Ask Palestine./Ask Palestrina./Ask dead Buddha stinking up the bicycle-//repair shop." List follows list, annihilating paradox ("Skill at games/of chance"), leading up to average outcomes ("A wondrous feeling of emptiness engulfs the extras/who are everyone not currently engaged in a real-estate transaction"). If you hear about the last guy, you will hear about the new guy, then the next guy. A plausible observation about today ("I can't work today because I am crazy") will be followed, sooner or later, by an excuse about yesterday (see the extended quote at the beginning of this review), and then by the revelation that the speaker is being interrogated about last Tuesday. An apparently offhand bit of scene-setting prompts numerous other possibilities in similar syntax. The deferrals and delays, as in a masterful novel, build up the pressure of expectation. And then, toward the end of the poem, they all start to explode in a series of defamiliarized polysyllabics equally reminiscent of Dante and Monty Python, as in this spot-on account of a Google-ized globe:

> Any surface at all, inside or out, you
> touch it
> and a scrolled menu appears,
> listing recent history,
> chemical makeup, distance to the
> sun in millimeters,
> distance to the Vatican in inches,
> famous people
> who have previously touched this
> spot, fat content,
> will to power, adjacencies, and
> further articulations.
> And each category has dozens of
> subcategories
> and each subcategory scores of its
> own, all
> meticulously cross-referenced,
> *linked*, so that each square
> centimetre of surface everywhere,
> pole to pole,
> from the top of the mightiest

—Maitreya's First Interview—

In the very near future, people everywhere will have the opportunity to witness an extraordinary and significant sign, the like of which has been manifested only once before, at the birth of Jesus. Then, according to Christian teaching, a star appeared in the heavens and led three wise men from the East to the birthplace of Jesus. Soon, once again, a star-like luminary of brilliant power will be seen around the world. What does this mean? How is it possible?

The answer lies in the fact that this mysterious event is a sign, and heralds the beginning of Maitreya's open mission. Soon after the sign appears in our skies, Maitreya will give his first media interview on American television.



On that open, public occasion, still unannounced as Maitreya, the World Teacher will present his views on the economic and financial chaos which now grips the world. He will explain its origins and final outcome, and present, to some extent, his recipe for amelioration of the present heavy burden on the poor of the world. Thus he will prepare the way for a more detailed and specific announcement of his ideas.

How will viewers respond? They will not know his background or status. Will they listen to and consider his words? It is too soon to know exactly but the following may be said: Never before will they have seen or heard Maitreya speak. Nor, while listening, will they have experienced his unique energy, heart to heart. Also, this is a unique time in history with whole nations stunned and apprehensive for the future. Therefore it can be assumed that many who hear his words will be open and eager to hear more. It is not for nothing that Maitreya has waited patiently for this moment to enter the public world; America, for one, would not have responded sooner. Now, for the first time in many years, a new Administration has to cope with financial chaos, unemployment and social unrest on a massive scale. The moment of truth for America and the world has arrived.

Not alone in America but worldwide, people are awakening to the need for and the possibility of change. The politicians and economists call the present situation a 'downturn' and a 'recession'. In truth, we are witnessing the last stumbling steps of the old order. Millions are becoming aware that unbridled competition and greed are not the safest path for men*, that such materialistic doctrines create a 'slippery slope' for the unwary, and, eventually, the international crisis we have today.

Of course, many people of burgeoning wealth stand clear of the present loss of confidence in the ways which have made them rich, and think it only 'a matter of time' until we are back on course and thriving again.

Will they heed Maitreya and recognize the sense of his argument? Lost in their arrogance and self-esteem, possibly not. However, many are less sanguine about a return to the status quo. Many have suffered painful losses and have lost faith in the old methods. The peoples of the nations are ripe and ready for change. They call out for change and a more meaningful life. Maitreya will remind men of the essentials without which there is no future for man: Justice and Peace. And the only way to both is through sharing.

This article, published in *Share International* magazine, was written by a Master of Wisdom. The Masters, headed by Maitreya, the World Teacher, are highly advanced teachers and advisors of humanity who are planning to work openly in the world very soon.

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the intestinal lining of a sea turtle
off Ecuador, has
billions of words and images
attached, and a special area,
a little rectangle, for you to add
your own comments.
It is the great work of a young-adult
global
civilization, a metaliterate culture
with time on its
prosthetic tentacles, at this point
slightly more silicon
than carbon, blinking vulnerably
in the light of its own
radiant connectedness.

It is true, and too bad, that we have been conditioned not to expect commentary this trenchant from our poets. There are others where Davies came from. Many of them are also published by Edge, a small press in Washington, DC. As it happens, Davies is one of the best. *Paraphernalia* is Davies's third book in sixteen years. His first, *Pause Button*, came at the close of the Reagan/Bush I era, and his second, *Comp.*, on the cusp of the Clinton and Bush II eras. We can only hope that the next eight years give him almost nothing in the way of familiar material.

To which the Davies of *Paraphernalia* might reply: "Zeno was half right." ■

MARIO SPADA

Ciro Petrone as Ciro and Marco Macor as Marco in *Gomorrah*

Waste Management

by STUART KLAWANS

The natural world makes infrequent appearances in Matteo Garrone's *Gomorrah*, showing up most notably as a box of rotten, stinking peaches dumped by a road near Naples. The peasant grandmother who has picked this unwanted fruit is not so much simple as senile, and doesn't know enough to come in from her rainy orchard. The old farmer lies ill in an antique wood-frame bed under the family crucifix, able to wheeze just one word—"Euro!"—to his visitors, who came to buy land to poison.

So much for the countryside and its traditions. The zone where rural and urban life mingle is represented in *Gomorrah* by two or three perpetually overcast beaches, all but devoid of people but littered with construction equipment and decaying blockhouses. That leaves the city as the site of the main action—and by "city" I mostly mean a Neapolitan housing project that from the outside resembles a concrete ziggurat and inside is a stack of walkways suspended under a cloudy, peaked skylight. The walkways run between rows of apartments that are decaying at best, and at worst have had their facades ripped away, exposing a damp and crusted back wall that is reverting to the condition of a cave. There are exposed, dribbling pipes in the building and pools of groundwater; garages filled with rubble but no cars; vast, high enclosures that seem to have been abandoned by the builder before they got their interior walls, or ceilings, or any source of light except for a rip in the building's shell.

Monumental Italian ruins, in the contemporary version. But even in them, paradoxically, nature still asserts itself. You unexpectedly hear bird song on the soundtrack, and in the background you see trees that rustle surprisingly green leaves, just before you witness the most heart-wrenching of the film's countless murders.

This, according to *Gomorrah*, is what the world looks like when it has been remade by gangsters.

The facts that justify this horrific vision have been established in a book of the same title by the journalist Roberto Saviano, who so vividly exposed the workings of today's Camorra—the Neapolitan mob—that he's been living under police protection since 2006 [see "Underworlds," December 10, 2007]. The characters who inhabit the film's wasteland are the quasi-fictional creations of Saviano, Garrone and four more screenwriters, who have conceived *Gomorrah* not as a unified drama but as a continuous, intensifying bloodletting that touches the lives of five distinct clusters of people.

The youngest are willingly implicated. One plotline follows 13-year-old Totò, a watchful, fox-faced, freckled kid in a soccer jersey, who delivers groceries in and around the ziggurat but soon works his way into a job delivering drugs. A second line follows two older adolescents—mature enough to visit a strip joint when they've grabbed a little money but young enough to get their skinny asses kicked out for sheer ignorance—who have memorized De Palma's *Scarface* and imagine they, too, can become bosses if they deploy their sole assets: idiot bravado and a cache of stolen weapons.

By contrast, the stories that focus on middle-aged characters are concerned with people who live inside the Camorra only because the outside seems not to exist. Don Ciro, with his comb-over and beige zip-up jacket, looks like any unhappy accountant who is waiting for retirement, except that instead of working in an office, he shambles about the ziggurat, delivering cash to half the resident families. Pasquale, a master tailor, is a livelier figure, who might be happy anywhere he could exercise his talent; but the only place he can work is in a Camorra sweatshop, where he supplies the skill needed to manufacture haute couture on the cheap.

The fifth plotline, the only one in which anybody ponders a moral choice, combines young and old in the characters of Roberto and Franco: a recent university graduate apprenticed to a senior waste-management executive. Their story provides a moment of relief from the oppressive landscape by taking *Gomorrah* to Venice, where Franco shows Roberto how to negotiate with big companies. (Lesson one: assure the client that the disposal will be "clean," and offer a bid so low

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that he pretends to believe you.) Back in the south, this plotline also brings the film into some of its most grandiose settings, such as the towering cliffs of an abandoned quarry, where Franco dumps his toxic sludge.

Meanwhile, a gang war is raging.

Put this all together and you get an impression of the Camorra that feels comprehensive because it shows a multilayered, omnipresent organization in the act of destroying a variety of people, one by one. What you don't get is the coherent overview that Saviano provides in the book. He takes pains to show how the Camorra has made itself indispensable in today's mercantile economy, where producers of goods labor in workshops dispersed everywhere in the world, or seemingly nowhere at all, while consumers find that their disposable income is forever shrinking. In this system, costs have to be driven down relentlessly at both ends of the chain—and people who are not overly gentle can make good money doing it.

In short, Saviano's book is more than a harrowing underworld exposé—it's a study of globalization. Moviegoers who have read *Gomorrah* will recognize a trace of this argument in the film's story of Pasquale, who risks working with an upstart Chinese competitor to the Italian sweatshops. Those who haven't read the book will have to figure things out by themselves. Proceeding more like a Robert Altman than a Francesco Rosi, Garrone omits as much explanatory material as possible while allowing his plots to move forward with few interconnections, or none. He gives you sensation, not exposition. This might have been cause for complaint, if Garrone had romanticized even one of his characters; but *Gomorrah* is as unglamorous a gangland movie as anyone has ever made.

Its scenes abound in the uncanny, the outrageous, the grotesque, rendered huge in the widescreen compositions but at the same time invested with a harsh realism. Scrawny youths dressed only in sneakers and briefs tramp through an estuary, test-firing automatic rifles and grenade launchers. Boys wait in line to face their gangster entrance exam: taking a bullet in the chest. Kids who are too short to see over the steering wheels drive trucks in circles, carting toxic chemicals. A sedan barrels along a highway at night, with a man's disembodied head poking up behind the back seat.

At first, it appears that Garrone is using a limited visual repertory to present these monstrosities. Either the actors' faces bobble in the foreground of underlit settings, through which a hand-held camera closely tracks them, or else the figures shrink to the relative size of bugs, in steady long shots of gigantesque locations. The intimate mingles with the far-reaching. But as *Gomorrah* pulls

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you in more deeply, Garrone's technique becomes steadily more complex. He splits the frame into jagged areas of light and impenetrable shadow; he pulls in or extends the depth of field, sometimes making the middle distance dissolve and sometimes sending your eye zooming clear to the end of a long perspective; he executes vertiginous crane shots (of a character picking his way through carnage) or lets you fly at thirty miles an hour over the city streets (as when the two *Scarface* enthusiasts ride a motorbike toward their final showdown). The camera's performance, like that of the actors, keeps growing in scale and expressivity, even as life gets worse and worse.

Perhaps the most horrible moment of all comes in the closing shot, in which an earthmover rumbles across a beach and into the distance, its shovel raised like a metal hand toward a cold, opaque sky. Cupped within that hand are two corpses. To me, that was the worst of it, in this endlessly compelling, endlessly violent movie—not the sight of dead bodies being lifted like a sacrifice but the realization that I had just witnessed order being restored.

A final alert for readers in the New York area: if you want to find out whether the director of *Gomorrah* has always been this brilliant, drop by BAM Rose Cinemas in Brooklyn for a retrospective, "The Films of Matteo Garrone," on view February 12–17.

There is only one pause in Laurent Cantet's *The Class*, and one brief scene shot outside a Parisian school. Both occur at the very beginning, when Cantet shows slim, 30-ish François Bégaudeau—by profession a public-school teacher and author, and now a movie actor—doing nothing in a cafe. The shot holds for perhaps five seconds; then Bégaudeau resolutely knocks back a cup of espresso (as if by an act of will) and heads out the door, purposeful, wide awake and moving on the balls of his feet.

From that moment on, *The Class* is as caffeinated as its protagonist, and with good reason. The semi-autobiographical character Bégaudeau is playing, François Marin, is plunging into a new year of teaching grammar and composition to people who don't necessarily want to learn them.

His pupils are a wriggling, fidgeting, babbling, argumentative, highly opinionated group of 13- and 14-year-olds—some two dozen in all, whose families come from Morocco, Mali, China, the Caribbean and in a few cases even France. When François makes up a sentence to illustrate the use of a word, his students demand to know why he always chooses weird names like Bill, instead of normal ones like Aïssa. When he tries to justify teaching the subjunctive imperfect, they make him admit that nobody uses it except people like *him*. And then, from the boys in the back row, comes a random inquiry about his sexual orientation. In most American movies where conflicts of race and class play out in the schoolroom, the teacher successfully smothers these differences under the cozy, homemade quilt of his good will. But this is France, and François has no fear of sharp distinctions. His pedagogical method is to push his students and then to shove, so that he's always on the verge of going too far with them—or finally steps over the line.

If this is a high-risk strategy for a teacher, *The Class* itself is no less daring. The nonprofessionals playing the young characters are all real students, who improvised their lines within situations that Cantet, Bégaudeau and screenwriter Robin Campillo invented. The kids' volleys with François were filmed like a tennis match—one player on this side of the net, all the rest on the other—which multiple cameras had to capture on the fly, without getting in the way of the ball. As you watch this exhilarating back-and-forth, it dawns on you that an ethically complex, emotionally troubling plot has taken shape; and you realize, with astonishment, that Cantet waited an hour to let it emerge.

The wonder of *The Class* is that, in its making, it was so much like a public school: full of pent-up energies and democratic self-contradictions, procedural constraints and scheduling hurdles. You'd think something like this would be unmanageable, yet this *Class* works beautifully.

As someone who has forbidden his children to interrupt him at the computer—if they're so damned hungry, let them heat their own frozen peas—I can appreciate Henry Selick's *Coraline*, an intricate mechanical device built to punish any kid who dares feel neglected. Through the use of vivid 3-D animation, *Coraline* teasingly fulfills the title character's fantasy of entering an alternative world, where she has attentive, fun-loving parents who cook. Then the movie turns on the little ingrate, impressing on her in freakish detail the error of her dissatisfaction. A novel by Neil Gaiman is credited as the source of the horror, but "In the Penal Colony" seems as likely an origin for this clattering tattoo of instruction.

Should I feed my kids into the machine? Granted, they're distracting and apt to complain; but they do know that Selick's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is fun and will recognize that *Coraline* is not. I'll give 'em a reprieve, on grounds of good taste. ■

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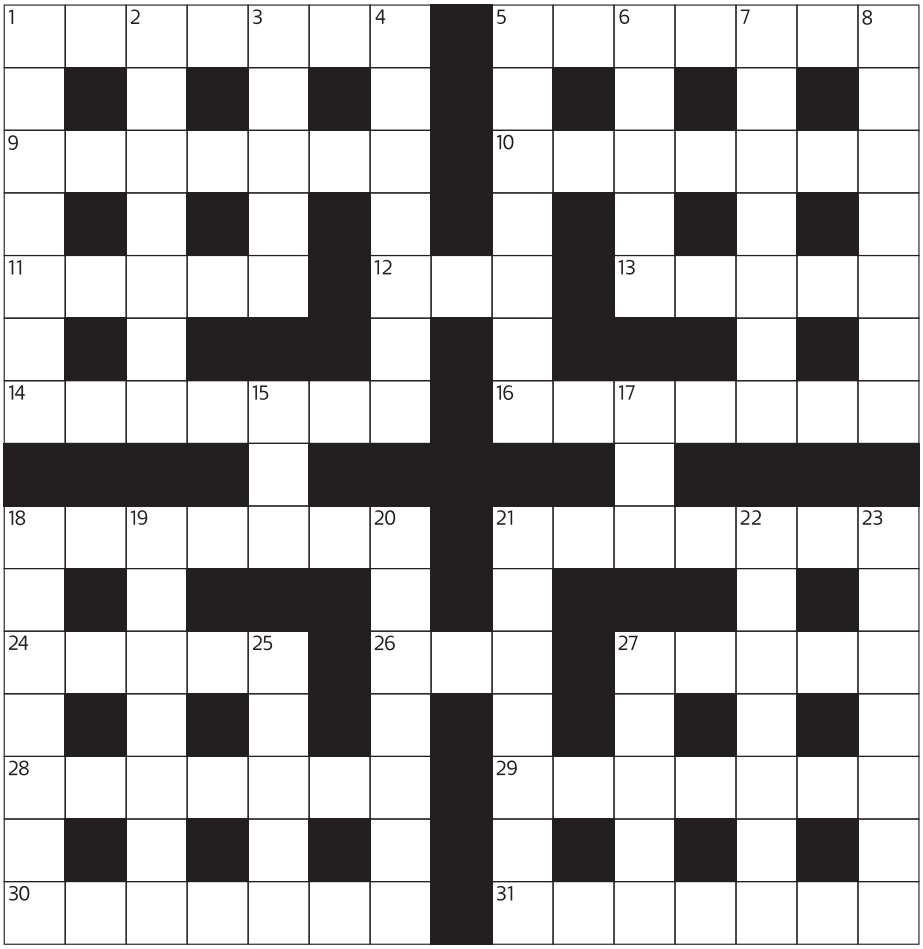

ACROSS

1 On the pavement, you'll see a snake! Stop! (7)

5 How hot air might come to you—or something that runs over the valley. (7)

9 You don't want to have things come out this way—you'll see it in certain people—*a k a* Generals. (7)

10 Cut a bit off to do it, and in Paris it returns in a clipped fashion. (7)

11 Good employees shouldn't do it to clock what might be a small version of the clock. (5)

12 One of the lowest digits, if you get to a point here. (3)

13 By the sound of it to inter a straw type, or a rasp type. (5)

14 The answer might be rotten, but you'll find it a small island indeed! (7)

16 In a cross-wind, less likely to be what you don't want someone to do to you. (7)

18 If you hear 11 with the birdie, someone may be getting ready to shoot you to make it! (7)

21 How could a mess of gruel be so responsible for one of the above? (7)

24 A relatively high spot characteristic of Greece? (5)

26 and **17** down Where many a person works away from the frozen surface. (6)

27 and **15** down A polite expression at the revolving door. (5,3)

28 The specialist medico is evidently told to go ahead with a rush! (7)

29 One's former mate has plenty, for instance! (7)

30 She gets the sort of heat you can use to carry your arm in. (7)

31 Eased a test situation, to show how one calms down. (7)

DOWN

1 Everything was due to being permitted. (7)

2 Adaptable, or maybe phony, as shown in blurry last pic. (7)

3 What the determined partygoer looks for to destroy self-confidence. (5)

4 Come down heavily with your feet, and in Paris getting up in it to be given something nice. (7)

5 Ships containers. (7)

6 A lousy performance, but a deadly thing to drop. (1-4)

7 A complete description to the news boss, in short, it is said. (7)

8 An old photo shows what the steno might do following the money in London. (7)

15 See 27 across

17 See 26 across

18 Getting quiet, lifts up encomiums. (7)

19 An exclusive group with the lake bed turned over. (7)

20 Do 7 without the boss, as part of the noun, certainly. (7).

21 With one's hands, bangs the sideboards. (7)

22 Commonly deteriorate what the gardener might do to plant things. (2,2,3)

23 With a great letter you get the word for lavish giving. (7)

25 Improperly teach a swindling type. (5)

27 A pull-up as a prize. (5)

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At Last... A Back Pain Device that Really Works!

189,428 Back Pain sufferers were skeptical just like you – Now they tell all their friends about this amazing secret

Say Goodbye forever to agonizing back pain!

Whether you have lower back pain, a herniated disk, a back injury, arthritis, or sciatica, you can escape your back pain when you sit – and you can do it without surgery or drugs! You need the best way to prevent your back condition from being aggravated when you sit – the amazing BackJoy, The Back Orthotic™.

BackJoy works wherever you sit; at home, in your car, at work – everywhere

Imagine sitting at home without that pressure and tightness at the base of your back. How about driving your car without that aching soreness? Sit at work without that painful, burning strain. Go to dinner without being afraid of the chair, or sit through an entire movie or long flight without squirming in pain. Yes, you can have your life back.

- **Registered FDA Medical Device**
- **Improves posture – sit 3" taller**
- **Prevents back pain from starting**
- **Easy-to-Use: No Straps or Buckles**
- **Sit anyway you like**
- **Endorsed by Doctors, Nurses, Physical Therapists & Pharmacists**
- **Small, Lightweight & Portable – fits in a briefcase**
- **Washable Fabric**

For Men and Women of all Ages, Shapes, and Sizes

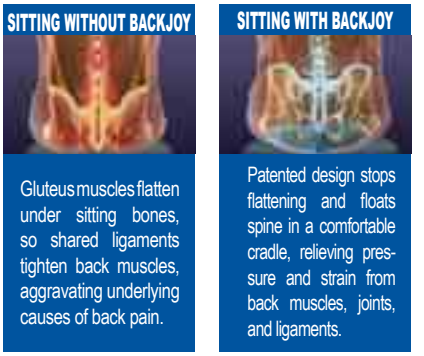
BackJoy's innovative and patented design requires it to be small, like a toilet seat. It's so small no one will know you are sitting on it. In fact, BackJoy must be smaller than your buttocks in order to work effectively. Whether your body is big or small, BackJoy works like a pain relieving shock absorber, floating your spinal system in a protective cradle.

"I found BackJoy useful for myself, and I recommend it to all my patients who have back problems. It's given me great relief."
- Marvin Weekstein, MD PC

"What a relief! After 16 years of nagging back problems, finally a product that really works!"
- Richard Storm Mobile, AL

"I tried donuts, cushions, even the doctor. Nothing worked. Then I tried BackJoy. It was a miracle seat for me. I recommend it to anyone who suffers from Back Pain when sitting."
- Leann Shaw Richburg, SC

BackJoy's Patented Orthotic Cradling System™ Floats Your Spinal System.


SITTING WITHOUT BACKJOY
Gluteus muscles flatten under sitting bones, so shared ligaments tighten back muscles, aggravating underlying causes of back pain.
SITTING WITH BACKJOY
Patented design stops flattening and floats spine in a comfortable cradle, relieving pressure and strain from back muscles, joints, and ligaments.

No Risk - Free Trial Act Now!

At BackJoy, we understand how you've been disappointed by cushions, massagers, or other gimmicks that just don't work. BackJoy is guaranteed to end your back pain and to prove it to you we will send you a BackJoy completely free of charge (just pay s&h) to try in your own home, car, or wherever you sit for a 30 Day risk free trial.

Call now! 1-800-694-4806

Order online at
www.mybackjoy.com
Use Promo Code: NA.03.09

NO RISK - FREE TRIAL OFFER

☐ **YES!** I would love to sit with no back pain! Send me my FREE BackJoy to try for 30 days! I have enclosed $8.95 to cover shipping and handling (For faster service, use your credit card in the space below!) You will send me my BackJoy with an invoice for the purchase price of only $39.95 (price includes Lifetime Warranty). I pay the $39.95 only if I agree BackJoy helps me sit more comfortably. If after 30 days I don't agree, I can return BackJoy to you and owe nothing more.

☐ Visa ☐ MasterCard ☐ Discover ☐ American Express

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____ Phone _____

(In case we have a question about your order)

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: _____

MAIL TO:
BackJoy, Dept NA.03.09
25852 McBean Parkway Ste. 508
Valencia, CA 91355

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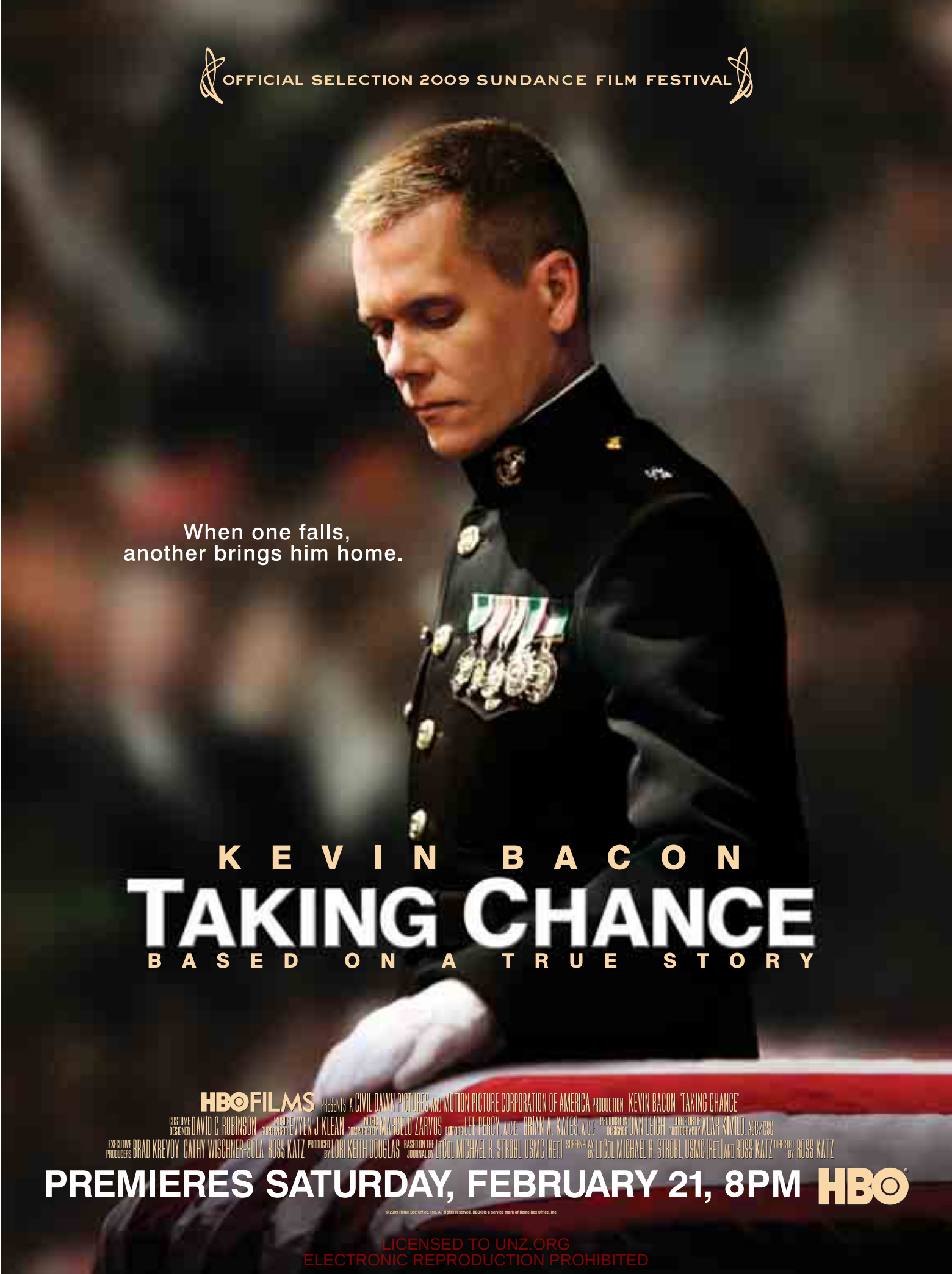
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2009 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL
When one falls,
another brings him home.
KEVIN BACON
TAKING CHANCE
BASED ON A TRUE STORY
HBO FILMS PRESENTS A CIVIL DAWN PICTURES AND MOTION PICTURE CORPORATION OF AMERICA PRODUCTION KEVIN BACON "TAKING CHANCE"
COSTUME DESIGNER DAVID C ROBINSON MUSIC SUPERVISOR EVYEN J KLEAN MUSIC COMPOSED BY MARCELO ZARVOS EDITORS LEE PERCY, A.C.E. BRIAN A. KATES, A.C.E. PRODUCTION DESIGNER DAN LEIGH DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY ALAR KIVILO, ASC/CSC
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS BRAD KREVOY CATHY WISCHNER-SOLA ROSS KATZ PRODUCED BY LORI KEITH DOUGLAS BASED ON THE JOURNAL BY LTCOL MICHAEL R. STROBL, USMC (RET.) SCREENPLAY BY LTCOL MICHAEL R. STROBL, USMC (RET.) AND ROSS KATZ DIRECTED BY ROSS KATZ
PREMIERES SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 8PM HBO
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